



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

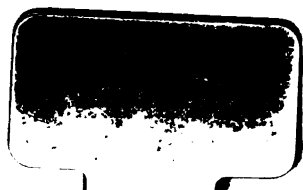
- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

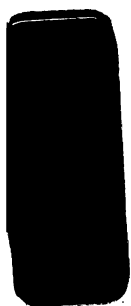
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

STEPPING-STONES
TO
HIGHER THINGS.







STEPPING-STONES TO HIGHER THINGS.

STEPPING-STONES TO HIGHER THINGS.

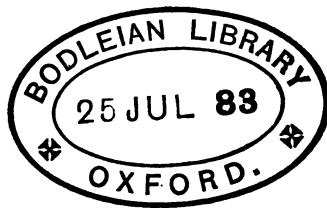
BY
CAPTAIN SETON CHURCHILL.

'That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.'
TENNYSON.

LONDON:
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1883.

141. j. 500.



P R E F A C E.

WHILE fully conscious of the many defects of this book, the contents of which were originally delivered in the form of extempore addresses, I send it forth, humbly trusting that the Holy Spirit may use it to enable some who now 'mind earthly things,' to 'seek those things which are above.' I fully recognise that human illustrations and anecdotes must of necessity fall very short in the attempt to explain Divine truths. At the same time I must confess to having been considerably helped to a right understanding of spiritual things through their instrumentality. In the hope that others may reap a similar benefit, I have availed myself very largely of many of the current anecdotes and illustrations used by eminent preachers and writers. While I have had very little trouble in tracing the origin of thoughts and illustrations gathered from books, I have found great difficulty in ascertaining the sources of those taken from newspapers, magazines, reports of addresses, and publications of a less permanent nature. Many were borrowed merely for the purpose of an extempore address without the slightest intention of publication, and without any note being taken at the time whence they came. If I have omitted to acknowledge my indebtedness to any, I trust they will attribute it to unconsciousness on my part rather than to any desire to ignore them. The following men, many of whom differ very widely from each other, have been largely borrowed from, viz. :

Bishops of Winchester, Ripon, Liverpool, and Meath ; Bishop Oxenden, Dean Goulburn, Dean Alford, Canon Farrar, Canon Kingsley, E. H. Bickersteth, Charles Simeon, J. B. Mozley, Faber, Robertson, Faussett, Charles Spurgeon, George Bowen, D. Whitton, Dr. Bonar, Gall, D. L. Moody, C. H. Macintosh, S. M. Haughton, and W. P. Mackay.

If I have failed to state the truth clearly, I trust readers will bear in mind that truth is independent of its poor advocates. Though my views may be faulty, and even if correct may be badly stated, yet I shall feel that I have not written in vain if this book leads any to a further study of the Scriptures for an answer to the question propounded by one of old, ‘What is truth?’ May the Spirit of truth guide both reader and writer onwards and upwards into all truth !

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTORY - - - - -	I
II. DIVINE STANDARD OF RIGHT AND WRONG - - - - -	10
III. SIN - - - - -	20
IV. NO DIFFERENCE IN GOD'S SIGHT - - - - -	27
V. PENALTY OF SIN - - - - -	35
VI. NOT OF WORKS - - - - -	45
VII. FAITH - - - - -	54
VIII. CAUSES OF DELAY - - - - -	63
IX. SUBSTITUTION - - - - -	73
X. GIFT OF GOD - - - - -	80
XI. REDEMPTION - - - - -	89
XII. CONVERSION - - - - -	96
XIII. ASSURANCE - - - - -	105
XIV. FINAL PERSEVERANCE - - - - -	117
XV. BACKSLIDING - - - - -	126
XVI. THE CHRISTIAN LIFE - - - - -	134
XVII. MEANS OF GRACE - - - - -	143
XVIII. CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY - - - - -	153

STEPPING-STONES

TO

HIGHER THINGS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

‘That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.’

TENNYSON.

A STORY is told of a young lady who had just come out in society, and had been taken by her mother to her first ball. While dancing, a bloodvessel was ruptured. She was at once carried home, and laid on her bed, while medical aid was summoned. The doctor upon examination, seeing there was no chance of recovery, called the father aside, and told him of his daughter's dangerous condition, begging him at the same time to acquaint her, that she might prepare for her end. ‘I cannot tell her,’ said the father; ‘she is my only child—I love her too dearly. Surely she is not dying!’ The doctor then informed the mother, imploring her to warn her daughter of the approaching end, but only received a similar reply. Prompted by a strong sense of duty, the doctor then took upon himself the task from which the parents shrank. He felt it strangely hard to tell a young lady, who naturally

looked forward to enjoying life, that already her course had run, and that she was to be cut off in her youth and beauty—her magnificent dress soon to be exchanged for a shroud. Gently and kindly he told her the plain truth. The poor girl shrieked out in all the agony of despair: ‘Oh, doctor, save me—save me! I cannot die!’ Then to her mother, ‘Oh, mother, you taught me to live, but you never taught me to die!’ And thus, poor girl, she passed away, having missed the aim and object of life.

It is easy to understand the brute beast living for the present, as he knows of no future existence. One can even understand the savage living for the present only, as his views of a future state are, to say the least, somewhat vague and indistinct. But it is very difficult to understand how civilized men, who even go so far as to ‘profess and call themselves Christians,’ are to be found with hardly a thought beyond this life. An atheist at dinner, looking round the table, said in rather a lofty tone: ‘I suppose I am the only living creature present who does not believe in a God.’ After a momentary pause, a lady’s voice at the head of the table replied: ‘I think you are not quite alone; my dog on the hearthrug there does not believe in a God.’ Man without a God to please, a Bible to guide his life, a future to live for, is very little raised above the brute creation. It has been remarked that when once infidelity can persuade men that they shall die like beasts, they will soon be brought to live like beasts. Of course there are a few of great and even of noble characters who do not believe in a God; but the great bulk of men of no faith have not any higher object in life than pleasing themselves, *i.e.*, satisfying the appetites and passions of the body, and pleasing their neighbours. ‘How are the mighty fallen!’ Man, made in the image of God, fallen from his high estate, and the dignity of manhood, lowered to the level of animal creation, and in some cases even so low that the more noble traits of

character, such as devotion and affection, are conspicuous rather in the dog or horse than in the man.

And yet one cannot but believe that, among the great number who are apparently living only for the things of this world, are to be found some who do think now and then about eternity. Even the most careless and indifferent are not entirely strangers to a longing for better things. Life is, nevertheless, with many frittered away in learning how to live, and when suddenly they are brought face to face with death, they, for the first time, realize the awful truth that their period of probation has passed beyond recall. It then dawns upon them that, whatever else they may have gained, they have missed the one great object of creation, preparation for the life to come. There are many who, in the midst of exciting pleasures or engrossing business, feel that this life is not all, and that it is not satisfying. They feel conscious of having been made for something higher, nobler, and purer, and yet their lives are no indications of their convictions. There is an uncertainty about the future which disturbs them, and death to them would be at the best but a terrible leap in the dark.

However necessary pleasure may be as a means of recreation, it can never satisfy an anxious soul. It is not, and never was intended to be, the object of life. Man is an eternal being, and nothing can truly satisfy him that has not reference to eternity. Unless our Saviour soon returns he must die ; and then, however much satisfaction he may have found in health and strength among the fleeting pleasures of time, they will bring him none when he most needs it :

'Tis religion that can give
Truest pleasures while we live.
'Tis religion can supply
Solid comfort when we die.'

'The pleasures of the world cannot comfort a man when he draws near death. The brilliant ball-room, the merry dance, the midnight revel, the party to Epsom races, the card-table,

4 *STEPPING-STONES TO HIGHER THINGS.*

the box at the opera, the voices of singing men and singing women—all these are at length distasteful things. To hear of hunting and shooting engagements gives him no pleasure. To be invited to feasts, and regattas, and fancy-fairs, gives him no ease. He cannot hide from himself that these are hollow, empty, powerless things. They jar upon the ear of his conscience. They are out of harmony with his condition. They cannot stop one gap in his heart, when the last enemy is coming in like a flood. They cannot make him calm in the prospect of meeting a holy God. Books and newspapers cannot comfort a man when he draws near death. The most brilliant writings of Macaulay or Dickens will pall upon his ear. The most able article in the *Times* will fail to interest him. The *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews* will give him no pleasure. *Punch* and the *Illustrated News*, and the last new novel, will lie unopened and unheeded. Their time will be past; their vocation will be gone. Whatever they may be in health, they are useless in the hour of death.*

Sooner or later it must dawn on every thinking person that pleasure in itself can never satisfy, whether we speak of the innocent pleasures of real recreation, or pleasure in its lower, grosser, and more sensual forms of enjoyment. We soon grow weary of gay friends, and get even bored in the midst of so-called enjoyment. A time must come when they lose their charm and freshness and become stale and unexciting. 'I said of laughter it is mad, and of mirth what doeth it?'

Many who have found mere pleasure fail to satisfy them, turn from it to the pursuit of honour, glory, distinction, and the fame of this world. By earning a reputation on the battle-field, or obtaining a great name as a statesman, lawyer, medical man, or merchant, they hope to satisfy themselves by becoming the object of envying and admiring crowds, as if such a bubble

* The Bishop of Liverpool.

reputation could satisfy them. On a great occasion, when an enormous crowd once assembled to do honour to Napoleon, a friend asked him if such a gathering did not give him great pleasure, and satisfy his ambition: His brief reply was, 'A still larger crowd would come to see me hung.' The glare and glitter of what men call renown may conceal many an aching heart, but it has certainly never really satisfied one. 'What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul.*

Others make the acquisition of money the highest object of life. With them it becomes quite a feverish passion. The more they obtain, so much the more they want. They grasp at it, and heap it up in piles; if not in some old chest like the miser of olden days, at all events in very large sums lodged at their bankers', or invested in business. They grow old and feeble in the pursuit of wealth, and still they clutch it, and crave for it as eagerly as when young. The passion is a growing one; they are never satisfied, ever wanting more. *Crescit amor nummi quantum ipsa pecunia crescit.*

Others there are who turn aside to the nobler pursuits of the study of literature, science, professional occupation, and other objects which distinguish civilized races from the rude and barbarous. However important and interesting in themselves, they fail to satisfy when taken up as *the* object of life. Each height attained only opens up to view more heights beyond of knowledge unattained, till the seeker in despair realizes his utter incapacity to reach the summit on which alone he can rest with satisfaction. He feels the truth of our Saviour's words, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again;† and well would it be for him if, like the Psalmist of old, he could cry out, 'As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for the living God.‡

* Mark viii. 36.

† John iv. 13.

‡ Psa. xlii. 1, 2.

This utter absence of satisfaction, co-existing with a deep-seated craving after it, is only one of the many results of the introduction of sin into this world. Philosophers in all ages have racked their brains to the utmost to endeavour to find a solution to the mystery of evil. Interesting as some of their speculations have been, none have yet been enabled satisfactorily to explain how it was that a God who was all-powerful permitted evil to enter this fair and beautiful creation, and thus mar His wonderful handiwork. Account for it we cannot, deny it we dare not. Enough for us that it exists, whether we like it or not. We have to deal with things as we find them, and not as they might have been. Undoubtedly, in the beginning 'God hath made man upright;' but now with St. Paul we cannot but say,* 'We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together.' The seed sown by God originally was good, but when we view the tares of sin growing up around, the only conclusion we can arrive at is that 'An enemy hath done this.'† For some mysterious reason, unexplained to us, God has permitted for a time sin to spread to such an extent, that it would almost appear as if the God of light, purity, and holiness had given place to the god of this world. The principle which seems to reign supreme is the survival of the fittest, which is but another way of stating the selfish fact that the weakest must go to the wall.

It is not only in the brute creation that we see evidences of the fall in each one preying on the other. The evidences are, if possible, even more conspicuous in human life. Man was originally made in the image of God, and walked with Him in calm and holy enjoyment. In the Garden of Eden it seemed easy to do right, hard to do wrong. But now the order seems to be reversed, and even the holiest men have to admit that terrible struggles and conflicts have to be carried on with besetting sin. If this is true of the best, how very real must

* Rom. viii. 22.

† Matt. xiii. 28.

be the existence of sin in the great mass of mankind ! All things seem to point to one great truth, that man is fallen from the original high estate for which he was destined. Hence all the unsatisfied cravings within the soul. There are, and ever will be, longings that this world can never satisfy. He who made us alone can know what will satisfy us, so that the highest object of life should be reconciliation with our Heavenly Father through the divinely appointed means, the merits of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In Him we have a personal Saviour, whom we may love, and for whom we can live ; and though the worldlings around may tauntingly ask, 'What is thy Beloved more than another ?' our hearts will joyfully be enabled to respond, 'My Beloved is . . . the chiefest among ten thousand. . . . Yea, He is altogether lovely. This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend.'*

In a world of sin, suffering, and disappointment we need something better than this life can give. We need a 'Friend that sticketh closer than a brother,' One who 'will never leave nor forsake us.' Life without such a One is a dreary blank, only to end in terrible darkness. Looked at abstractedly, life at the best is disappointing. So many bright dreams of youth are unfulfilled. But with such a One all is changed. What high aims, objects and aspirations life in Christ has ! It is the one key that opens up all the mysterious, unsolved problems of life. Life's duties and responsibilities become grand and noble. Henceforth the believer has an object for which to live, and, with a sense of reconciliation with God, he can follow the example of the eunuch, who 'went on his way rejoicing,'† or that of the Philippian gaoler, who 'rejoiced believing in God.'‡ He can enter into the meaning of the Apostle's words, 'Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.'§

* Cant. v. 9. † Acts viii. 39. ‡ Acts xvi. 34. § 1 Peter i. 8.

I have lately had the privilege of reading a letter from an earnest Christian officer who took part in the battle of Tel-el-Kebir. It was written before the engagement took place, and finishes up with a postscript, descriptive of his feelings, in those beautiful words—

‘Peace, perfect peace, *the future all unknown.*’

I could not help contrasting the feelings of that officer with those of another, who was one day in command of the advance guard for the brigade which marched up to the relief of the late Sir George Colley in South Africa. As we were riding alongside each other, I asked him if he was prepared to meet his God, in the event of anything happening to him. His reply was, ‘Please do not speak to me now about these things, it would unnerve me. Death is the last thing I try to think of.’ I feel sure that, had the occasion occurred, he would have nobly done his duty; but, at the same time, who can doubt which of these two officers, both such nice fellows, had chosen the higher things of life? The one would have faced death with a dogged, determined resolution; the other, in addition, would have had much joy and peace: and this is the privilege of every believer, whether exposed to danger or not.

Joy and peace are not necessarily demonstrative. More frequently they assume the form of a deep, abiding calm within the soul. On the surface of a lake the effects of every wind are perceptible in the disturbed waters, but deep down beneath there is a settled calm. Storms and winds may come, but the elements cannot greatly disturb that inner calm. God’s children have their share of this world’s afflictions, and are often sorely tried; but still they have that joy which our Saviour told His disciples ‘No man taketh from you.’ They alone know the full force of the benediction with which, Sunday after Sunday, our congregations are dismissed: ‘The peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.’

Having attempted to show what I believe the higher things of life are, I shall now pass on to show, step by step, how they are to be attained.

'Tis not for man to trifle—life is brief,
And sin is here.
Our age is but the falling of a leaf,
A dropping tear.
We have no time to pass away the hours ;
All must be earnest in a world like ours.

' Not many lives, but only one have we :
One—only one.
How sacred should that one life be,
That narrow span :
Day after day filled up with blessed toil—
Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil.'

CHAPTER II.

DIVINE STANDARD OF RIGHT AND WRONG.

'Search the Scriptures.'—JOHN v. 39.

A MAHOMMEDAN might spend a whole hour in proving, logically and clearly, that a certain doctrine is taught in the Koran. But when he has done so, if I am unwilling to admit the views of the Koran as a standard of right and wrong, that Mahommedan has not advanced a single step towards convincing me of his views of truth. Before searching the Scriptures to see what they say about the plan of salvation, let us begin by asking ourselves if we are willing to admit their authority. It may seem to be somewhat a work of supererogation to attempt to prove to those who 'profess and call themselves Christians,' that the Christian Bible is the only Divine standard of right and wrong. But experience teaches the contrary. Many an honest and sincere soul has had his faith in the Bible upset by articles in reviews, and arguments heard at dinner-tables and in the social circles, borrowed second-hand from sceptical writers, to such an extent that, though professedly a Christian, he does not quite know what to believe. Thus frequently the whole force of an argument, proving that the Bible teaches a certain doctrine, is met by the person addressed saying, 'That is not my idea of religion,' or 'That is not my idea of God.'

The Bible is either God's Word, or else it is not. If once we admit that it is what it professes to be, our private opinions must give way. If our ideas are not in accordance

with it, the sooner we change our ideas the better. The whole Bible stands or falls together. We are not at liberty to pick out a truth here and there, according as it suits our taste or our convenience. If, on the other hand, the Bible is not true, let us honestly face the difficulty, and admit that for many centuries past, the most civilized countries in the world have based their laws on wrong principles ; and that all the parliaments, the leading statesmen, philanthropists, missionary societies, and nations themselves, have been making a grand mistake by following the dictates of a book proved to be a myth from beginning to end.

I once asked an officer who denied the authority of the Bible as a standard of right and wrong, what he did believe was the true test by which we could regulate our lives. His reply was, that he believed that each man's conscience was the only standard. Very few thinking men will, however, I imagine, admit that the conscience can ever be a standard of right and wrong. As a matter of fact, we know that it is quite possible that a man may act very wrongly, and at the same time very conscientiously. Before the English governed India many a Hindoo has conscientiously given his child to be devoured by alligators in sacrifice to a deity ; many a Brahmin has conscientiously burnt his mother alive beside the dead body of her husband. Many a Thug has conscientiously murdered a victim in sacrifice to his goddess Kasli. And even under the garb of Christianity, many a Jesuit has conscientiously thought it was right to do wrong that good might come ; and many a Roman Catholic judge has sent martyrs to the stake, conscientiously believing that he was doing right, but with such a tender heart of pity, that he was moved to tears in passing sentence. Our Saviour warned His disciples that 'the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

* John xvi. 2.

To say that each individual's conscience must be the standard of truth, and that it cannot be wrong for a man to act in accordance with his conscience, regardless of what that conscience may dictate, or how far from the truth it may be, is to pour contempt on Divine truth, as well as on human responsibility. If once this was universally admitted we should very soon drift into that state where there is no king and no fixed authority, 'but every man did that which was right in his own eyes,*' which, owing to the very conflicting interests of mankind at large, would be that which is wrong in the eyes of his neighbours. As there is, moreover, a vast difference of opinion in the consciences of men as to right and wrong, we can only conclude that conscience, unaided by something higher, is no unerring guide.

To this it may, perhaps, be replied that the collective consciences of many may be a guide where one would be insufficient. But the collective consciences of many, or public opinion, as we call it, differ in different countries, and public opinion in one country is fluctuating. Thus, public opinion on the subjects of duelling, intemperance and slavery has become greatly enlightened of late years. So, too, the Bunyans and Galileos whom one generation persecuted, have become the idols of the next. The John Wesley whom the Church of one generation would not tolerate, has his monument reared in Westminster Abbey by the Church of the next.

Something more settled than a shifting public opinion is required then for our guidance. Probably few will be found to contend that God's laws are different according to the country in which we find ourselves, and that what is wrong in one country is right in another. God's laws are unalterable and unaffected by time or place.

From observing the laws of nature we find that there is no fickle changeableness in them, and therefore we conclude that the

* Judges xvii. 6.

mind of the Creator is neither fickle nor changeable. If right in this conclusion, we have no reason to suppose that the Creator is changeable and variable in the great fundamental laws of right and wrong. Certain dispensational truths may change with the dispensation, but the grand fundamental laws on which all society is based remain the same. The Christian Bible is certainly, in this respect, wonderfully in accordance with the laws of nature. We are told therein of God that He is 'the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning;'^{*} that 'God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man that He should repent;'[†] that 'He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.'[‡]

Moreover, we do not find that in the laws of nature, ignorance of existing law cancels it. The native of India who is ignorant of the law of the force of gravity will not be released from the penalties incurred by the infringement of that law, any more than the scientific Englishman. Need we be surprised then if individuals, as well as nations, find that the eternal laws of right and wrong are not held in abeyance because they are ignorant of them? Here again the Christian Bible accords with the laws of nature. Our Saviour said to the Jews: 'Ye do err, *not knowing* the Scriptures.'[§] The fact of their ignorance of the existing laws of right and wrong did not make their conclusions right.

If then we are right in coming to the conclusion that the individual conscience of men, and the collective consciences of public opinion are not standards of right and wrong, wherein has God revealed His will to man? Some do not believe that the Creator has ever given men a revelation. They believe that He has set this world going like a watchmaker winds up a clock, and then leaves it to go on of its own account. But there are much greater difficulties in this creed than in the

^{*} James i. 17.

[‡] Heb. xiii. 8.

[†] Num. xxiii. 19.

[§] Matt. xxii. 29.

simple belief of the Christian. Lord Bacon said that if he did not believe in the Bible he would rather believe in the Koran, or in some heathen sacred writings, rather than believe that a wise God would leave ignorant man without any revelation of His will. A mariner might get to the desired haven without compass or chart, by watching the sun by day and the stars by night. But however much a man desired to please God, how, without a revelation, is he to know what actions are pleasing and which are displeasing to an unknown God? Unless he is certain that his Creator is a God of love, he does not know that He will be pleased by acts of kindness. Unless he knows that He is a God of justice, he does not know that He will be pleased by his acting fairly to his fellow-men. The heathen had gods who delighted in war and bloodshed. The Hindoos to this day worship and assimilate themselves to gods and goddesses who are reputed to be licentious. No doubt many a refined and educated sceptic who does not believe in the Bible, has far loftier and purer ideas of God than the Hindoos ; but then, though he will not admit it, and possibly is quite unconscious of the fact, he obtained his ideas indirectly from the Bible. Even if he has never opened a Bible, he obtains his ideas from contact with those who in their turn obtained it from the Bible.

It seems strange that any who admit the existence of a Creator should deny the existence of a Divine revelation from that Creator. It has been pointed out* that if it was possible for God to create that wonderful piece of mechanism called man, it was at least *possible* that He should find some way of revealing His will to that man. The next question is, was it *probable* that He would do so, or was it more likely that He should leave him totally in the dark regarding his origin and his future destiny? The probabilities are that a rational Creator when creating a rational man, had a rational object in

* Faber.

doing so. Would that object be most likely to be fulfilled by the created man being informed of the object of his Creator, or not? If a father in India had a son in England, whom he had not seen for many years, but regarding whom he had very definite objects and ideas in life, would he be more likely to secure the accomplishment of his desires by informing his son of them, or by leaving him in ignorance of his wishes?

Some there are who say that there are so many religions professing to emanate from God; and because all cannot be true they reject them all. This is arbitrary and illogical, and suggests the story of an Eastern king who, finding it difficult to decide the rights of a disputed case, after hearing both sides, determined in future to listen to one side only. The existence of several counterfeit religions does not disprove the existence of the true, but rather confirms it; for who would trouble to counterfeit that which has no value, or who could counterfeit that which has no existence?

Some there are, however, who call themselves friends to Christianity, who believe that the sacred writings of all the principal religions of the world are more or less revelations from God. These concede to the Bible the position of *primus inter pares*, but allow to all other religions an equal claim to be revelations from God. We may well cry out, 'Save us from such friends.' While fully admitting that there are traces of a Divine revelation which have filtered down through centuries of time in the different false religions, and that beneath a heap of rubbish and human tradition and teaching may be found relics of what once was pure unalloyed truth, yet to put the Bible on a par with these is to lower it to the level of human teaching. Thoughtful men do not deny that there is in most religions something that denotes a common origin; but the false religions 'are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became

vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image . . . who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator. . . . And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind.* Doubtless as far back as the tower of Babel, when men were scattered on the face of the earth, each family carried with it part of the true religion. Being separated, each added on according to their tastes ; hence diversity with a certain amount of similarity. God's children, however, adhered to His Word alone, and that revelation has continually been increased up to the close of the New Testament.

Christianity is essentially an intolerant religion. It admits of no equals, and brooks no rivals. The early Christians might have saved themselves much persecution if they would only have acknowledged their religion to be but one of many. The Pagans were quite willing to admit Christ into their Pantheon at Rome, but what irritated them so, was to be told that their impure heathenism was wrong, and that Christianity alone was right. The early Christians, inspired, guided, and directed by the Apostolic spirit, died rather than admit the equality of other religions. 'Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.†

Space will not permit of a more thorough investigation of the claims of the Bible. Many able writers‡ have gone more thoroughly

‡ I here take the opportunity of recommending the following books, to which I have been much indebted for many of the thoughts I have brought forward in this chapter : 'Infidelity ; its Cause and Cure,' by Dr. Nelson, published by Geo. Routledge and Sons, Broadway, Ludgate, London ; also 'Philosophy of the Plan of Salvation,' published by the Religious Tract Society ; and 'Difficulties of Unbelief,' by Faber—a book, I fear, now out of print.

* Rom. i. 20.

† Acts iv. 12.

into the subject, to whom I must refer any who doubt the fact. I have endeavoured to show that God has given man a revelation, and that it is not any of these followed by heathen religions. Moreover, that as the consciences of individual men differ so extremely, as well as the collective consciences or public opinion of different nations, we need something further. We need some unchanging and recognised authority to appeal to, and we find it here. 'Heaven and earth shall pass, but My word shall not pass away.*' 'All His commandments are sure. They stand fast (*margin*, are established) for ever and ever.†' 'For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven.‡' 'The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations.'§ Our actions frequently fall short of what we know to be right, so that as the watch needs to be tested by the chronometer, our actions need to be tested by our consciences. But as the chronometer itself needs to be tested by the sun, so our consciences need to be tested by the light of God's Divine revelation.

There are many differences of opinion even among thinking men, so that the great questions for us to ask is not what this or that man thinks, or this or that collection of erring men, but 'What saith the Scripture?' The Bible¶ alone must be

¶ Speaking of the effects of the work of Christ, who, it must be remembered, is the life and soul of the Bible, Canon Farrar says: 'It expelled cruelty; it curbed passion; it branded suicide; it punished and repressed an execrable infanticide; it drove the shameless impurities of heathendom into congenial darkness. There was hardly a class whose wrong it did not remedy. It rescued the gladiator; it freed the slave; it protected the captive; it nursed the sick; it sheltered the orphan; it elevated the woman; it shrouded as with a halo of sacred innocence the tender years of the child. In every region of life its ameliorating influence was felt. It changed pity from a vice into a virtue. It elevated poverty from a curse into a beatitude. It ennobled labour from a vulgarity into a dignity and a duty. It sanctified marriage from little more than a burdensome convention into little less than a blessed sacrament. It revealed for the first time the angelic beauty of a purity of which men had despaired, and of a meekness at which they had utterly scoffed. It created the very conception of

* Mark xiii. 31. † Psa. cxi. 7. ‡ Psa. cxix. 89. § Psa. xxxiii. 11.

accepted as the final court of appeal. Among all the changing things of earth, here at least is one thing which never changes. Wisely did the reformers of our National Church say, 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation ; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an Article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.*' They saw from history, as well as from the Book of Revelation, that it was quite possible for the Churches even to go astray very far from the truth ; so they wisely directed the generations to come to refer every disputed point to the Scriptures themselves.

There may be some things in the Bible, as St. Peter says, 'hard to be understood,'† and difficult to reconcile with each other ; but if we have sufficient evidence that the Bible, as a whole, is God's Word, we can 'easily afford to wait'‡ till that day when all things shall be made clear. It would indeed be strange were there no difficulties in the Scriptures, when there

charity, and broadened the limits of its obligations from the narrow circle of a neighbourhood to the widest horizons of the race. . . . It cleansed the life, and elevated the soul of each individual man. And in all lands where it has moulded the characters of its true believers, it has created hearts so pure, and lives so peaceful, and homes so sweet, that it might seem as though those angels who had heralded its advent, had also whispered to every depressed and despairing sufferer among the sons of men, "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, that is covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold." Others, if they can, and will, may see in such a work as this no Divine Providence, they may think it philosophical enlightenment to hold that Christianity and Christendom are adequately accounted for by the idle dreams of a noble self-deceiver, and the passionate hallucinations of a recovered demoniac. We persecute them not, we denounce them not, we judge them not ; but we do say that unless life be a hollow mockery, there could have been no such miserable origin to the sole religion of the world, which holds the perfect balance between religion and morals, between meek submission and the pride of freedom, between the ideal and the real, between the inward and the outward, between modest stillness and heroic energy—nay, between the tenderest conservatism and the boldest plans of world-wide reformation."

* Article VI., Prayer Book.

† 2 Peter iii. 16.

‡ Dean Alford.

exist so many unsolved problems in everyday life. When finite minds like ours come into contact with the infinite mind of God, there must ever be certain depths the former cannot fathom.*

If we take the Bible as God's Word, the question is what does it say on any given subject? Each one must decide this for himself, humbly searching for the truth, and seeking the aid of God's Holy Spirit, of whom our Saviour told His disciples, 'When He the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth.'† 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them.'‡ Let us now proceed in the next chapter to ask what the Bible says of man's present condition in the sight of God?

* A story is told which if not very refined, is at least very characteristic of what capital is made of some of these difficulties, which exist only in theory, and not in practice, by a certain class of sceptical stump orators. A sceptical lecturer once appealed to his audience to ask if it was right that his body should be punished for sins twenty years hence, which he had committed twenty years ago, when scientific men say that the body changes once in every seven years. He alleged that the body to be punished would not be the same that committed the sins. Such an argument as this to an ignorant crowd would of course have great weight. After sitting down amid great applause, a gentleman, who was personally acquainted with him, got up, and said that before going further, he had an important piece of information to give them regarding the character of the lecturer, which was, that the lady who accompanied him as his wife had never been married to him. The lecturer at once indignantly denied the assertion, and added that the gentleman must have known it to be untrue, as he was actually present when the ceremony took place. The gentleman then quietly replied that he certainly had been present fifteen years before, when two persons remarkably like the lecturer and his wife had been married; but that in accordance with the lecturer's own reasonings, as their bodies had completely changed twice within that time, and no new ceremony had taken place, they could not be legally married! Many a fallacy can thus be exposed when treated in the *reductio ad absurdum* manner.

† John xvi. 13.

‡ Isa. viii. 20.

CHAPTER III.

SIN.

‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’—ROM. iii. 10.

THE Bible speaks with no uncertain sound when it tells us of the state of man in God’s sight. No doubt the first step in the Christian life is to realise our fallen condition. We must first know ourselves to be lost sinners before we begin to think about the way of escape from their doom. If a man were aroused in the middle of the night and told to escape, he would naturally ask, ‘Why?’ He does not know of any danger. But if told that the house was on fire, he would at once realize his position, and attempt to escape without questioning. And so in spiritual things; once let a man know his state and realize his danger, and he at once becomes intensely in earnest to ‘flee from the wrath to come.’* We all are sinners, and in danger of the punishment due to sinners, but all do not know it. It is quite possible for us, Sunday after Sunday, to denounce ourselves publicly as ‘miserable sinners,’ without in the least realizing the fact, or estimating the danger in which we are.

There can be no true ‘joy and peace’ in religion without a true realization of our standing in God’s sight. Some may deceive themselves, and have a false peace, but sooner or later they will be undeceived. It is but the momentary false security of the man in a burning house, unconscious of any danger. A man may be very far gone in some deadly disease, and yet not

* Matt. iii. 7.

know it. False friends may flatter him with vain hopes, but a true friend would reason with him, and even at the risk of forfeiting his esteem would point out to him the danger of neglecting the disease, and the necessity of sending for a physician.

A broad exposition of the diverse nature of sin is given in the General Confession of the Church of England Communion Service : 'We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness which we from time to time most grievously have committed by *thought, word, and deed* against Thy Divine Majesty.' Even those who cannot recall outward and flagrant transgressions of God's law, must at least admit that they have sinned in 'thought,' if not in 'word' and 'deed.' Not only for every sinful action, but for every sinful thought and 'every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account in the day of judgment.'* I once called the attention of an officer in India to this fact. His reply was : 'Well, if God takes account of all the sinful thoughts that have passed through my mind, I must be a sinner indeed.' How few there are who would dare to write down all the sinful thoughts that have passed through their minds in a single year, and let their friends read them. But God has recorded the sinful thoughts of many years.

'There is not a sinful thought we have,
Or wicked word we say,
But in Thy dreadful book 'tis writ,
Against the Judgment-day.'

Many excuse themselves by saying that they cannot help sinful thoughts, and that therefore they are not responsible for them. Possibly they cannot help sinful thoughts, but does this relieve them from blame and responsibility? Does it not rather show how awfully sinful and depraved their hearts are, when they cannot even drive out thoughts which are not pleasing, and disloyal to God. If we obeyed the command to love the Lord our God with all our heart, could we entertain disloyal

* Matt. xii. 36.

thoughts contrary to His wishes? The condition of true allegiance to Jesus as our King is 'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.'* Is it not one of the strongest proofs of our fallen nature that in our hearts we desire things displeasing to God? Was it not one of the most serious charges brought against the children of Israel that they 'in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,'† though in reality they remained in the wilderness. They thought of and desired things which God said were not for their good, and therefore denied them. However much we may excuse ourselves, the wisest of men recorded the fact, 'The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord.'‡ To judge from the Bible, God has always taken notice of sinful thoughts, for as far back as before the flood it is written that 'God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the *thoughts* of the heart was only evil continually.'§ In later days the Psalmist says, 'In heart ye work wickedness;'|| and David warned Solomon that 'the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.'¶ Nor has the heart become better since then, nor has God ceased to take notice, for in the New Testament, the latest revelation given to us, our Saviour, in describing mankind, says, 'Out of the heart of men proceed *evil thoughts*, adulteries, fornication, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.'** Far from exonerating men from blame and responsibility for evil thoughts, He places them first on a catalogue of some of the grossest sins. We can the more easily understand His doing so when we consider that if the evil thoughts had not been first indulged, the sinful consequences would not have followed.

Sin not only consists in what we have done wrong, but in

* 2 Cor. x. 5. † Acts vii. 39. ‡ Prov. xv. 26.
§ Gen. vi. 5. || Ps. lviii. 2. ¶ 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. ** Mark vii. 21.

what we have omitted which we ought to have done. In other words, we are guilty of sins of omission as well as of commission. In the General Confession of the Church of England it is thus put : ' We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done.' An eminent writer, in speaking of his past life, says : ' I had no bad habits, but neither had I a particle of religion. My good qualities were all negative. I did not tell falsehoods, I did not gamble—all very good ; but I might have united all these things, and yet have been a Mahomedan or a Buddhist. There is nothing peculiarly Christian in these negative qualities ; they require no special Divine influence to originate them ; they do not lift a man above the strata of heathenism. I believed in one God, and so do Mahomedans, but there was no life in my belief.'

God made us for His honour and glory, and the Apostle tells us, ' Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*' If all our actions in life have not been done with a view to the glory of God, we have at least been guilty of missing the great aim and object of our creation. If a man makes an article for a certain purpose, and it fails to fulfil the object for which it was made, he either destroys it or throws it away. Need we then be surprised if, when we have failed to accomplish God's purposes in our creation, He puts us away from His presence for evermore ? It is not enough for us to say we have done no harm, even if it were true (an untenable hypothesis), for our existence was not intended to have a purely negative result. Even inanimate objects fulfil the purpose of their Creator ; are we, then, who are so highly endowed above all the animal creation, to fulfil no higher function than the pebbles on a sea-shore, which lie alongside each other without doing one another any harm ? God made man for Himself, to live for Him, to love Him, to glorify Him, and step

by step to know Him. The mere abstention from evil is only negative ; duty requires active participation in doing good. As we ourselves reap the benefit of what others have done before, so the obligation is laid on us to continue and extend the benefits we receive.

We are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves. If we do not do so, we fail. There is no use saying we do not *hate* our neighbours. We are commanded to *love* them, and if we love them, we ought to the utmost of our ability to help them and do them good. We are told of some to whom will be said, ' Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels ; for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me no meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink : I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in : naked, and ye clothed Me not : sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee ? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye *did it not* to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me.'* Many in that day, when it is too late, will realize that God holds them just as responsible for the good they might have done which they have left undone, as for the evil they have done which they ought to have left undone. We are not told that they did any harm, but we are told that they neglected to do any good. Their sins were those of omission.

As a nerve may be deadened by artificial means, and rendered insensible to pain, so is it possible to deaden conscience and to make it proof against all feeling. The conscience that once was tender, and even sensitive, may, by continuance in sin, become so deadened as never to be caused a pang of reproach. In spite of all that can be said, there are some who do not realize that they are sinners. They may admit that they

* Matt. xxv. 41—45.

are not as good as some, but they see no reason to distress themselves. They know not what it is to keep the law of God in all its holiness and purity. We can only leave such to the working of the Holy Spirit, whose work, we are told, is to 'reprove (*margin*, convince) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin because they believe not '* on Christ. Intercessory prayer for such is the only remedy.

A visitor going from the fresh air into a badly ventilated sick chamber, perceives an oppressive atmosphere which is quite imperceptible to the poor patient, who has perhaps been breathing the foul air for days, or weeks. What is unbearable to the visitor, seems quite natural to the patient. So in spiritual things, it is quite possible from living in an atmosphere of sin, to become so deadened as to be utterly unconscious of its hatefulness. This frequently has the effect of making the sinner self-righteous, while the best and holiest men the world has ever seen, who lived in the purer atmosphere of God's Word, have always been painfully conscious of their own shortcomings and unworthiness.

‘ They who fain would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.’

Their experience is more like that of St. Paul, who said, ‘When I would do good, evil is present with me.’†

God says of man, ‘There is none that doeth good, no, not one.’‡ As soon as the child knows right from wrong, so soon does it begin to do wrong. In some children it is more conspicuous than in others, but there are very few in whom it cannot be detected in a greater or less degree. One may be assure when looking at an innocent babe asleep on its mother's breast, that it will develop into a sinful man, as that the playful and gentle tiger-cub will some day exhibit the bloodthirsty ferocity of its species; the seeds are sown, and time only is required for their natural development. Never were truer words penned than

* John xvi. 8.

† Rom. vii. 21.

‡ Psa. xiv. 3.

those in our Prayer Book, 'therefore in every person born into this world it *deserveth* God's wrath and damnation'* As St. Paul says, 'Death passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned*.'† Sin does not always outwardly demonstrate its presence. There are many amiable natures in whom it is very hard to believe sin exists. But we cannot see into each other's hearts. The Creator who made man should know what is in him, and He has revealed to us very clearly and decidedly our nature. He sees perhaps that what we call good actions are prompted by corrupt motives. To take one example from among many—the man who gives largely 'to be seen of men.' We cannot tell what motive prompted the gift; to us it appears a good action. Our Saviour says, 'Verily I say unto you, They have their reward;' but the reward is given them on earth, not in heaven.

We cannot understand the origin of evil, or why God permitted it. Many vain and useless explanations may be given. Enough for us that the Bible is silent on the subject of its origin, but is very clear in telling us that we have got sinful natures. We have inherited the sinful nature of our common ancestor Adam. To some it may seem strange that a sinful nature should be allowed to be hereditary. But in looking around we see similar things to which we take no exception, and yet none the less strange. For instance, a man disobeys all physical laws, and sows the seeds of consumption, or other disease. He not only reaps the penalties of his own folly, but his children, and their children inherit the disease. It may seem very hard on them, but the bare fact remains, and no one thinks of denying it. The remedy in our case is at hand, and if we neglect it the fault will be our own.

* Article No. IX.

† Rom. v. 12.

CHAPTER IV.

NO DIFFERENCE IN GOD'S SIGHT.

'For there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.'*—ROM. iii. 22.

IN the previous chapter I endeavoured to show that the Bible teaches us that all men are sinners. I now desire to point out that there is no difference in God's sight between one sinner and another, and that all must be saved in the same way. Perhaps there is no truth so humiliating to the natural man as the one taught in the above text. Many, who are quite willing to admit that they are sinners, consider that they have a claim on God's mercy because they are not so bad as many others around them. St. Paul says of them, 'they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.'†

Men frequently divide their fellow-creatures into classes, mentally labelling them 'very good,' 'good,' 'moderate,' 'bad,' 'very bad.' They then again subdivide each class till there are so many degrees between 'very good' and 'very bad' that

* 'Now it is quite clear that St. Paul's great object in the Epistle to the Romans was to put down all claims on the part of man to rewards for services done by him to God. Accordingly, in the first three chapters he shows all men, whether Jews or Gentiles, to be sinners, and so *deserving*, not justification or acquittal, but condemnation. His conclusion is, that if we are saved, it must be by the merits of Christ or by free grace only; without any claims on our part on the score of desert.'—BISHOP OF WINCHESTER, *On the Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 305.

† 2 Cor. x. 12.

it is almost impossible to distinguish between the degrees. One is reminded of the skilful artist's shading from black to white, in which it is impossible to detect where the dark ceases and the light commences. The Bible, however, admits of no such divisions. It declares that all men are divided into two classes—the *Saved* and the *Lost*. We find them under different names in the Bible ; but, under whatever name, there the two classes stand in bold and striking contrast to each other. Sometimes they are called the saved and the lost ; at other times, the dead and the living ; elsewhere, the righteous and the unrighteous, or believers and unbelievers. Illustrations to represent the same two classes are frequent, such as goats and sheep, good fruit and bad fruit, wheat and tares, good seed and bad seed, and many others. But never are intermediate stages spoken of when the idea is to bring forward the standing of men in the sight of God. In the parable of the Sower there are but two classes, the one yielding fruit and the other yielding none ; though in the latter class we are shown the three different ways they hear the Gospel.

It is a most solemn thought then, that each reader of this little book belongs to one class or the other. If he does not belong to the class that are saved, he must of necessity belong to the class that are lost. If not spiritually alive, and yielding fruit, he must be spiritually dead. If a shilling is not a good one, it must be a bad one. There may be some very good counterfeit coins that deceive the inexperienced, and pass well among a number of others, but still they are not good coin. Although they may pass for a time and escape detection, they will be condemned as soon as they are brought to the Mint. There may also be some very good counterfeit Christians who may not only deceive those around, but even deceive themselves ; but they will not deceive the Great Searcher of Hearts in the Great Day of Assize.

It is very easy to look at the drunkard, the thief, the liar, the profligate, and those who habitually indulge in open vice, and to admit that such are sinners. The persons so condemned will, probably, not deny the charge. But to look at the strictly moral and upright man who is amiable and kind to his neighbours, honest and fair in his dealings with his fellow-creatures, loving and affectionate to his relations, regular in his attendance at a place of worship on Sundays as well as on other days, devout and attentive when there, and then to have to admit that such an one, unless already washed in the blood of Christ, is in need of a Saviour, does seem very strange to the natural man. Yet the Word of God has so declared it. 'There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.'

St. James says: 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*' The heart that would sin once against God, would sin more frequently if the opportunity were granted. God demands implicit obedience to the law as a whole, not giving the option to man as to what he shall keep or reject. So also in Nature, if a man were to attempt to make a selection in the laws he would obey or disregard, he might be careful not to strain his bodily or mental faculties, and take various other precautions, to perish after all from the neglect of a law he had decided to disregard. A man in a fit of passion may be guilty of murder; he may have most carefully avoided infringing any other law of his country, but that one crime is sufficient to cause his own death. Another man may have killed many men in his lifetime, but the penalty is the same—death. The laws of our country make no difference between one and the other, and taking it for granted that the man who has so little regard for human life as to kill one man, would, if opportunities offered and it suited his purpose, kill many men, have attached the same

* James ii. 10.

penalty to both. The law of the country so intensely abhors this disregard for human life that it attaches the highest penalty it possibly can inflict on even one infringement of its laws. It can inflict no higher penalty on one who has broken it many times. So in spiritual things. God, foreseeing how much harm sin would do in this world, and to show His hatred and abhorrence of it, attached the highest penalty possible to it. The sinner may only sin once, or he may sin many times, but the penalty is the same—he is guilty of all.

One act of a rebel shows a disloyal heart. Many more rebellious actions may follow or not, as circumstances dictate. People are apt to judge harshly of a poor uneducated man in the lower strata of society because he openly gives way to temptation, and to think too well of those in the upper classes who do not openly indulge in gross sin. The restraints of society may, after all, have been the only motives which restrained the latter. There is such a thing as sinning in heart and in desire, but being restrained by circumstances around from openly indulging in sin. The brutal drunkard who starves and beats his wife, and the amiable, refined, high-minded young lady who hardly knows the meaning of an impure word, both have a sinful nature, and both require a change of heart. The one may have given way to all the brutal instincts of a depraved nature, while the other, debarred by the restraints of society, may have refrained from ever openly indulging in any of the grosser forms of sin; but in God's sight, both alike are sinners, 'for there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' Without any wish to incriminate the one, or to exculpate the other, it is well for us to see that there is no claim to merit before God on account of the circumstances in which He has placed us. Had the circumstances been reversed, perhaps the results might have been reversed also.

It is said by medical men, that in the healthiest children

ever born the seeds of disease exist. Certain climates and certain conditions may bring more prominently forward one disease than another, but the seeds are there. And so with sin, certain states of society may curb or develop certain sins, but still the seeds are there. For instance, let us take the case of a child born in a Christian home 'whose cherished existence is his parents' hope, whose little limbs are wrapped in ermine, and fondly sheltered from every approach of harm; his faculties unfolding only to enjoy, increasing only to be satisfied; every feeling considered, every *thought directed*,'* and compare it with the 'squalid offspring of degraded passion who opens his eyes upon filth and profligacy, his ears upon blasphemy and falsehood; unclothed, untaught and uncared for till nature matures his faculties into instruments of crime.'† Who can say, that had the circumstances and surroundings been different, the results might not have been reversed? The bars of the tiger's cage may effectually prevent him from doing harm, but they do not change his savage nature. While thanking God for the restraints of society, which are in great measure the results of Christianity, we must recognise the fact that all ground for self-glorification is removed.

If we have only sinned once in thought, word, or deed, or have ever failed to do what we ought to have done, or have done what we ought not to have done, we have 'come short' of the glory of God. We may have sinned many times, or we may have sinned few times; but many or few, we have come short of God's standard of perfect holiness. To use an oft-repeated illustration. If the standard of height of her Majesty's Guards was fixed at six feet high, men of five feet eleven and three-quarter inches would be rejected, just as much as men of five feet, though the former would be only one-quarter of an inch too short. One can well imagine many recruits all below the standard waiting to be measured. The taller ones would

* 'Christ our Example,' by Caroline Fry.

† *Ibid.*

ridicule the hopes of the shorter ones anxious to be enlisted. But when brought to the standard, all alike, whether tall or short, would be doomed to disappointment. Many pride themselves on not having been so bad as others, and therefore, while fully believing that many will be rejected for falling so very far short of God's standard, flatter themselves that as they are much nearer the standard they will be accepted. But there is no difference : God recognises no degrees. All have been guilty of breaking some of the laws of God ; and one shortcoming brings the sinner within the power of the law : just as one inch of water over a man's head will suffice to suffocate him as surely as the deepest ocean.

When the Spirit works in the heart of man it convinces him of sin ; not of individual acts only, but of sin as an indwelling power, of which the acts are the indication. A physician cares little to remove the outward indications of an inward disease until he has first removed the primary cause ; and so until man is regenerated by the Spirit of God, sin reigns within. Possibly some individual sins may be overcome ; but as long as the heart remains unchanged, sin will show itself in some form or other. I have known a drunkard become a total abstainer, and a great blessing he became to his wife and family. Having overcome his great besetting vice, he became intensely self-righteous :

‘ What avails one sin plucked up, one evil stain,
If in the heart ten thousand still remain ?’

When once God's Holy Spirit convinces of sin, it matters not whether the individual has in the sight of man been a good or a bad one ; that soul feels sin as he never felt it before. Instances are not wanting of such intense anxiety to escape from the burden of sin, as to upset the mind and impair the health ; and that in not only outwardly bad lives, but in those which are considered upright and respected. Perhaps such have gone on quietly through life in a state of satisfac-

tion and easy contentment about themselves. But when once the Sun of Righteousness shines into the dark heart, the sinner sees how vile he is. A room may be very dirty, but if it is also very dark the occupant is unconscious of its condition; once let the sun shine in, and its condition becomes instantly apparent. The sun is not the cause of the condition of the room, it is merely the means of making it apparent; so, too, does the Spirit of God render apparent to the sinner the corruption and iniquity of his heart.

The natural man realizes neither his own sinfulness nor that of his neighbours. If incarnated in any special form of vice, he recognises something wrong, but beyond that he has no deeper sense of sin. A little girl is once said to have asked her mother where all the bad people were buried, as she had been reading the epitaphs in a churchyard in which each tombstone recorded the fact that a good person lay there. Whether true or not, it is very characteristic of the awful popular delusion many labour under, that their neighbours as well as themselves are on the road to heaven. The Bible statement that 'Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat; and strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it,'* in their opinion requires a good deal of explaining away.

The fall of man certainly affects his memory. In the course of a very short time we forget our sins. Sometimes an individual is for a time troubled in conscience about something he has done which he ought to have left undone. But as time goes on that completely passes away, and he forgets all about it, and acts and speaks as if God had forgotten it too. Time will not thus easily atone for sin, and though man may, God will not forget. He alone knows what harm sin has done to his fair creation. He knows that it cost Him the death of His

* Matt. vii. 13.

only-begotten Son. What loving parent can ever forget the cause of the death of his well-beloved child? He remembers it too well, and intensely hates the cause. We may be assured of this, that God recalls each sin that nailed His Son to the cross.

CHAPTER V.

PENALTY OF SIN.

‘The wages of sin is death.’—ROM. vi. 23.

IN the two former chapters I endeavoured to show that the Bible says that all men are sinners, and that no difference exists with respect to justification between one class of sinners and another in God’s sight. In this I desire to show what the penalty of sin is, which we are very clearly told in the above text. I have, however, heard it said that as ours is a God of love, He must be too merciful to punish any hereafter for the transgression of His laws. The question naturally arises, how do we know that the Creator is a merciful God? The answer at once is, the Bible says so. True it does, but it also tells us other things about God. Among the many things we are told concerning God is, that He is a jealous God, and intensely hates sin; and that though ‘He willeth not the death of a sinner,’ yet that He ‘will by no means clear the guilty,’* and that there shall be ‘a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’† ‘For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge His people.’‡

Many people worship a God of their own creation. They

* EX. xxxiv. 7.

† Heb. x. 27, 31.

‡ Heb. x. 30.

select certain texts pointing out the characteristics which they like, and they quite overlook the characteristics they do not like. Now this can hardly be said to be a fair way of dealing with God's Word. If the Bible is true, not only does it tell us of a God of love, but it also tells us that the same God has other characteristics which we are equally bound to accept. If the Bible is not God's revelation of Himself, we certainly do not know that He is a God of love from any other source. The Hindoo who saw his beloved ones crushed beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut car, or his aged mother burnt alive by the side of his dead father, could hardly have been the originator of these ideas about God. Still less could the sensual Mahomedan who believed in propagating his religion by the sword, and whose sacred writings find no place in heaven for his wife, his mother and sisters, have taught the doctrine with any degree of consistency. The same might be said for the ascetic Buddhist priest who is denied any domestic happiness. It is needless to go beyond these into the different systems of fire worshippers and devil worshippers. Sufficient for us that no other systems of religion have taught the merciful nature of God in the way the Christian religion has.

But it may be asked, if religions have not done so, does not Nature teach that the Creator is a God of love? It is wonderful how much of the indirect teaching of the Bible is mixed up with all our knowledge whether of Nature or of other things. One who does not believe in the Bible will say that the God of Nature is a loving God. True, He is a loving God, but we do not learn the fact from merely looking at Nature. We learn the fact from the Bible. Put aside the Bible, and what have we? A Creator who allows earthquakes in which thousands are slain, the bursting of volcanoes in which whole cities are buried. Storms at sea by which women and children are made helpless widows and orphans. Famines in India and China by which millions of lives are lost. Epidemics of cholera by which

thousands are swept away. Just to watch the death-struggle of any single individual dying by slow starvation or cholera, and then to multiply that case by millions, and one may well stand aghast to think of the aggregate sufferings of the human race. Apart from the Bible it would be hard to prove that the God of Nature shows Himself to be a merciful God. Nor can the unbeliever in the Christian's Bible get out of the difficulty. He must explain and give a reasonable account of the sufferings entailed by death and sickness, by earthquakes, famines, epidemics, etc. The believer turns to the Bible, and in it he finds that the whole human race is suffering from the effects of sin.

If then we come back to our Bibles, we find that 'the wages of sin is death.' But it is sometimes said that God is not so particular about His laws being obeyed as some of us believe, and that therefore He cannot inflict such a terrible penalty as death on the infraction of His laws. As the fact of the Bible saying the contrary is not sufficient proof to some, let us for a moment turn to that other book as it has been called, 'the Book of Nature.' In doing so we must bear in mind that the same God wrote both books, and reveals Himself to us in both. People may and do argue about the great hereafter, on the ground that none can speak from experience, and therefore none can speak with authority : but no one will deny the great facts of Nature, since we are all daily witnesses of their existence. God has said : 'The soul that sinneth (or infringeth His laws), it shall die.* Many, however, say that God is too merciful to carry out the penalty. But the same God has also decreed that the penalty of the infringement of the laws of Nature shall also be death physically. Is He too merciful to carry out His own decrees ? Seek your answer from outraged Nature. As a great lover of Nature said : 'Nature kills, and kills, and kills, and is never tired of killing, till she has taught man the terrible lesson he is so slow to learn, that Nature must

* Ez. xviii. 20.

be obeyed. Nature is as fierce when offended as she is bounteous when obeyed. She spares neither woman nor child. She has no pity. Silently she strikes the sleeping child with as little remorse as the strong man.*

The laws of God, whether revealed to us in Nature or in the Bible, demand obedience or exact a penalty. 'The soul that sinneth (or infringeth law), it shall die,' is as applicable to the laws of Nature as to the laws of the Bible. Death is the unavoidable penalty of the infraction of law. 'Here is the law of gravitation. It is a useful law, an indispensable law. Without it you could keep nothing in possession. If you laid down your book, your hat, your coat, your watch, you might never recover them. There could be no certainty that they might not float away to parts unknown; nay, worse than this—you part with your wife and children to go to your daily occupations, and without the law of gravitation it is equally uncertain if you will ever meet again. You surely cannot spare the law of gravitation. But since there is such a law, if you would save your life you must keep something solid under your feet; for merciful as God is, step but the eighth of an inch from the roof of your house, and you are a mangled corpse. It seems hard—does it not?—that a deviation of only an eighth of an inch should convert a living man into a mangled corpse! But that is the law, a law He will not set aside. Surely God is particular, very particular . . . Here is arsenic. It looks like sugar; it is sweet to the taste; it is for many purposes useful. But let it be introduced into your stomach, by accident or by design, and you will be racked with pain—it may be lose your life.'† It is possible that for a time we may defy Nature in some cases, but sooner or later she will demand her due, and we shall have to pay the penalty.

If, then, such is the character God gives us of Himself in the Book of Nature, need we be surprised if we find the same laws expressed in His other Book, the Bible? But then the

* Charles Kingsley.

† 'Friendly Words.'

question arises, 'Is God not merciful?' Yes, He is a long-suffering merciful God; but 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.*' He is merciful, but then it is in His own appointed way. After the Indian Mutiny the Queen of England showed herself to be merciful as well as just. She dictated the terms by which, if obeyed, the rebels might come in and find mercy. They might have liked other ways, and neglecting the appointed way of mercy, have paid the penalty with their lives. It would have made her none the less merciful. Their folly alone would have been to blame. As in the temporal kingdom, so in the spiritual. The laws of the spiritual kingdom have been broken by us. God might have justly destroyed one and all the rebels. 'But He willeth not the death of a sinner.' He has appointed a way by which He can be gracious and merciful, as well as just. The way to find mercy is humbly and obediently to accept His terms. Dictate not to Him, but let Him dictate to us. Let us ask what penalty He has attached to sin in the Bible, and instead of arguing about it with our fellow-creatures, 'Search the scriptures,' and therein learn how to escape from the penalty of sin.

The loving nature of God is far more conspicuous in the Bible than in the laws of Nature. In the Bible He has sent His only-begotten Son to provide a way of escape, by Himself suffering the penalty. He has become the substitute to bear what we deserve to suffer for infringing His laws. Now Nature admits of no substitute. The occupants of ill-drained towns, badly ventilated houses, malarious swamps, have to bear the penalty themselves of typhoid fever, cholera, and ague. Though the individuals themselves sometimes are not to blame, yet no substitute can suffer for them.

One often hears it advanced that it is impossible to under-

* Isa. lv. 8.

stand how a loving God can reconcile eternal punishment with love. With our present knowledge, granted that if not impossible it is at least very hard to understand how the two can be reconciled. Inability on our part, however, to understand, is no proof that such a thing does not exist. With increased knowledge, which one day every Christian hopes to have, it may turn out to be a very easy thing to understand. Our inability to understand may be only the result of ignorance of existing facts of which we now know nothing. The natives of India could not understand at first how messages were transmitted to England in a single day. The laws of electricity existed, but they were ignorant of them. A story is told of an African chief who would not believe the traveller who told him, that in England men could sometimes walk across lakes because the water became so hard. Many a captain guides his ship by the help of a compass who cannot understand why the magnet should cause a needle to point to the north. How often even in this life, with increased knowledge, have we had cause to smile at our former ignorance and inexperience! So, 'when all things are revealed,' we may yet smile at our present difficulties in reconciling all God's mysterious ways.

One day all things shall be made clear, and then we shall see how it was that a God of love could ordain such an awful penalty to the breaking of His laws. Now we have to accept in faith what our poor finite minds cannot understand, and what is opposed to our natural feelings. The question then is, does the Bible in the plain acceptation of the language teach eternal punishment as the wages of sin? If it does, we are bound to acknowledge the doctrine, and wait till all things are made clear before we say that it is impossible for a God of love to have ordained such a penalty.

I would commend the following remarks to the reader, by one* who himself at one time did not believe in the inspiration

* Rev. Geo. Bowen.

of the Bible, and who, needless to say, could hardly therefore have believed in the doctrine of eternal punishment : ' If one could penetrate the future and visit millions of worlds that exist, one might be in a position to speculate on the subject. For all anyone can say to the contrary, the suffering of the doomed sinners of this world fifty thousand years hence may be the means of hindering countless worlds like this from going into sin ; and the number of the suffering compared with the number of those beneficially and even savingly affected by their sufferings, may be but as one grain of sand compared with all the sands of the sea-shore. No man can say that this may not be so ; and therefore no man is in a position to say that the infliction of endless punishment is incompatible with the mercy of God. Looking at the interests of all beings, there may after all be in such punishment a greater manifestation of mercy than of wrath.' The same writer also says, ' Man cannot be trusted to determine his own penalty. Impartiality is a prime requisite in the inquiry, and that is just what is ordinarily absent from the mind of man. The fact that he is a sinner places him under a bias. We do not submit to the brigands in the country, the question what kind of legislation is necessary to put a stop to brigandage. The forger cannot be trusted to make laws for forgers. Men that are fond of drink are not the sort of men to determine how the liquor traffic shall be dealt with.'

The amount of penalty inflicted for the violation of laws, is the only way a lawgiver can reveal his hatred of certain crimes. The more severe the penalty attached to a certain crime, the more intense will be his hatred of that crime. How do the natives of India know that the English Government look upon infanticide and suttee as among the worst of crimes ? Former Governments did not do so. The English have attached the highest possible penalty to the commission of those crimes. The purer the morals of a nation, the more severely will they

deal with the infringement of their moral laws. And as with nations, so with individuals. The holier the individual, the more intense will be his hatred of sin, and the greater the penalty he will attach to it. But God is infinitely holy, and therefore infinitely opposed to sin, so that, after all, it is not so surprising to find that the penalty attached to sin is infinite, without end—eternal.

We have very false ideas of right and wrong. We do not hate sin as God hates it, and therefore would not attach such a high penalty to it. This doubtless arises partly from the fact that we only see the partial results of sin, whereas God sees in their entirety the evil effects on this fair creation. In dealing with sin man thus appears more lenient than God. In the history of the Jews, we find God reproving them for leniency to His enemies, but never reproving them for being too severe, showing clearly that God is not governed by human laws and ideas of right and wrong, mercy and justice.

Some speak of the fall of man as a mere trifle, only the eating of an apple or some forbidden fruit, and then think it extremely arbitrary on God's part visiting such a light offence, which only took a few minutes to commit, with such a long and terrible penalty. Now, in the first place, as has been pointed out by other writers, duration of punishment is not meted out in proportion to the length of time taken to commit an offence. It takes but a second to pull a trigger and make a man a murderer, and it does not take long for a rebel to sign his name to a document pledging himself to band together with others to overthrow the lawful government and to incite internal rebellion. But for either of these offences the offender may consider himself fortunate if he escapes with only a lifelong imprisonment—if, in other words, the Government only inflicts the longest period of imprisonment within its power. And, secondly, I think most thoughtful students of the Word will agree that the eating of the forbidden fruit possibly had a very much deeper

meaning than is generally supposed. Many failing to see this, lose the point of the whole transaction, and thus do not learn the lesson God would teach us.

God required something of man as a test of his obedience and in acknowledgment of His sovereignty. It is not at all uncommon for a government or for a large landed proprietor to grant land to an individual or to a society, only demanding a trifling annual tribute in acknowledgment of the owner's supremacy and right over the land. A missionary once told me of an individual who granted a piece of land in India to a Missionary Society, and only asked in return a few plantains and grains of rice, the produce of the soil, to be given annually in acknowledgment that the land really belonged to him. But God did not even ask this much. He merely asked them to acknowledge His supremacy by refraining from eating the produce of a certain tree. The smaller the demand made on them as a test of obedience, the greater was the offence in not complying. Had the demand been of a more extensive nature, the greater would have been their excuse.

But they were without excuse. Their sin was the same as that of the Jews: 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' Their crime was that of internal rebellion and treason against the King of kings, crimes which, if committed against the State, as all history shows, are punished with the greatest severity. Tempted by the Evil One, they aspired to be as gods, knowing good and evil, and to throw off the yoke of God by refusing to render Him that whole-hearted, unquestioning obedience He demanded, and thus to become lords of creation. Far from being a light offence, it was the basest ingratitude of the human heart asserting itself to One who had given them everything they could possibly desire, but who had not made them mere inanimate machines, incapable of exercising that freedom which was accompanied with the responsibility to choose between good and evil.

The sin of our forefathers is daily being continually repeated by those who indulge in unlawful pleasures, because they cannot understand why they are commanded to do certain things, or to refrain from doing others. It should be enough for us that God has so commanded it, and we should rest assured that some good reason exists, which hereafter will be explained. Now we should in faith treat such commands as tests of our obedience. But can we be surprised that, when men fail to render this obedience to the King of kings, the Lord of Creation, He should exercise the same power that He has permitted to earthly governments, and, seeing the awful consequences of sin and internal rebellion, have made the penalty as far-reaching as an omnipotent, eternal God could do? And that not for one, but for thousands of transgressions, with the most humane desire of deterring others from rebellion in His kingdom, not only in this world, but possibly in future worlds as well, who may be led to see and avoid the cause which has such fearful consequences.

CHAPTER VI.

NOT OF WORKS.

‘Not of works, lest any man should boast.’—GAL. ii. 9.

THE first thought of an awakened soul is how to be saved, but I purpose first pointing out how *not* to be saved, before going on to the plan of salvation. This order may possibly appear strange to some, but if one only remembers that man’s ‘heart is deceitful above all things, and prone to evil, it is only natural that he should take up with the wrong, rather than the right, way of salvation. If, in addition, one recalls the fact that the great enemy of souls is specially interested in trying to draw away the anxious from ever being saved, one need not be surprised at men, when left to themselves, choosing the wrong way. The Evil One is anxious to keep any from being awakened, but when once awakened, it is only natural that his next step should be to lead astray. As mankind will have a religion of some kind, it is questionable if he does not gain more by leading men astray into false systems and plans of salvation than by making them apathetic and indifferent to true religion. This possibly may account for the fact that in countries where false systems of religion prevail, more people are intensely in earnest in following out the teaching of that religion, as among the Hindoo, Buddhist, and Roman Catholic devotees, than in countries where a purer faith prevails, in which it will generally be found that those who are thoroughly in earnest are in the minority.

It is wonderful how many who have been brought up under sound scriptural teaching and influence, are quite ignorant of the elementary and fundamental truths of the Christian faith. One, who had all the advantages of an early training, once told me he thought he should get to heaven if only he could repent enough of the past, and by leading a good life in the future, could cancel all his past sins. Now, if such were the plan of salvation, we should have good cause to pride ourselves on the fact that by our earnestness, zeal, and attention to God's laws, we had earned a right to enter heaven. Undoubtedly there would be a sense of satisfaction in the thought, not unlike that of the self-made man who has made his way in life. His success in life has not been the result of accidental birth, or of family interest, but entirely of inherent qualities of perseverance, and attention to the duties of life. However praiseworthy such men may be in life, the Apostle clearly shows that such a principle will not enable us to get to heaven. 'Not of works, lest any man should boast.' Those of us who ever get there will in all humility have to admit that no merit of our own brought us there, and will have to ascribe all the praise and glory 'unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.'*

God has demanded of man *perfect* obedience. 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.†' God demands day by day a life of perfect obedience. Living a perfectly holy life to-morrow, were such a thing possible, will not be more than God requires for that one day. To-morrow's good deeds will provide no credit wherewith to cancel yesterday's debts. The man who promises, and actually pays day by day for each fresh requirement, will not have all his unpaid debts of former years cancelled. In the payment of the debt of sin to Divine justice, it is not enough that in the future we comply with His demands, if in the past they

* Rev. i. 5.

† James i.

have been neglected. The burden of sin may, and does, daily accumulate, but it cannot possibly diminish. The man who has already murdered twelve persons may in the future refrain from ever killing another, but that will not decrease the number he has already to answer for. He may add to the number, but never can he decrease it. Sin once committed can never be undone. There it remains, a lasting witness to the guilt of the sinner.

A lawyer once came to our Saviour and said, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?'* He evidently thought, as many think now, that by his own merits and efforts he could obtain eternal life. Our Saviour took him on his own ground, and told him what to do, and concluded with the words, 'This do, and thou shalt live.' He then went on to explain what the law was. It was not merely refraining from doing harm, but it included doing all the good possible. The priest and the Levite had not done the poor robbed man any harm, but they had lost the opportunity of doing him any good. Our Saviour's object was to show the man that he could not get to heaven by his own merit, because he was a sinner, and therefore 'condemned already,'† by not having in his past life done all the good he could. Not only had he broken the command, 'Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind,' but he had not even obeyed the lesser command to love 'thy neighbour as thyself.'‡

There are two motives which prompt men to serve God. The one is *love*, and the other *fear*. I think very few will doubt which is the highest, purest, and least selfish motive,

‡ 'The evangelical religion supplied a more constraining motive. It did not ignore or decry the necessity for good works, but it put them in their right place. It told us that good works followed, and did not precede the good news. Good news first, and good works afterwards. That was the watchword of the Gospel as revealed to us in Holy Writ.'

—BISHOP OF MEATH.

* Luke x. 28.

† John iii. 18.

and which begets most good works. Is it the loving wife who tries to anticipate her husband's every wish, or the slave who does what he is ordered for fear of the consequences of disobedience, that does the best service? The wife does what she thinks will please her husband, and is as zealous when he is absent as when he is present. The slave, on the contrary, merely does enough to escape punishment, and no more. It is forced labour; the interests of the master are of no concern to him. If salvation was to be given us as the reward of good works, all our actions would be done out of purely selfish motives. Fear of going to hell is a poor motive to stimulate a man to good works. But God works by love. He gives us salvation as a free gift, and thus He wins our love. 'We love Him because He first loved us.'* Then if we love Him, we shall try to please Him, as our Saviour said to His disciples: 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.'† We must never lose sight of the fact that the motive that prompts an action is everything. It is necessary that good actions should proceed from right motives to be acceptable in God's sight. Hence that Article in the Church of England Prayer-Book which people find it so hard to understand: ‡ 'Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of His Spirit, are not pleasant to God, forasmuch as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ, neither do they make men meet to receive grace.'

If salvation was to be obtained by works, there could not possibly be any 'joy and peace' in this life. Possibly a few self-righteous people might feel a false security, trusting to their own works, and thinking their works good enough. But no truly humble child of God could ever feel sufficiently satisfied with his works to permit him to rejoice. He would be ever feeling how very far short he fell of the requirements of God's holy standard. He would thus be robbed of the sweet enjoyment of true religion, and would have nothing left but dread

* John iv. 19.

† John xiv. 15.

‡ See Art. xiii.

and uncertainty. What we want in a life of sin, temptation, and sorrow such as this, is not a mere vague hope that some day we shall be saved, provided enough good works can be done before we die, but the full assurance of sin forgiven already.

But the question naturally arises, does not God require good works? Certainly He does, and here it is that so many unlearned in Divine truths cause confusion, and reverse God's plan of salvation. The Apostle says: 'These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.*' Then again, Christ 'gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.†' But let us remark that it is 'they which have believed,' *i.e.* those that are 'redeemed,' who are exhorted to be 'careful,' and 'zealous of good works.' It is in fact an exhortation to God's own children to show forth their praise 'not only with their lips, but in their lives,' and not an appeal to the unsaved at all. These do not love Christ, or they would show their love to Him by obeying His commands, and closing with the offer of mercy. In one of the Homilies of the Church of England an illustration from St. Augustine is quoted which puts the case very clearly: 'A wheel does not become round by rolling, but it rolls because it is round.' Thus the true Christian works because he is saved, and not in order to be saved. Once washed in the blood of Christ, it is as natural for him to show forth his faith by his works as for the round wheel to roll.

Good works are the spontaneous outflow of a heart full of love and gratitude, 'for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,‡' and 'a man's heart deviseth his way'§ for good or for evil. The young believer, overjoyed to find himself rescued from the terrible consequence of sin, feels a gratitude

* Titus iii. 8. † Titus ii. 14. ‡ Matt. xii. 34. § Prov. xvi. 9.

similar to that which prompted the Apostles to say : ' We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*' The fruit on a tree is not the life of the tree, but it shows that there is life in the tree. It is the result, and not the cause. So spiritually, good works, or the fruits of the Holy Spirit, are the results of life in the Christian, but they are not the life itself.

Many know that they have defrauded God, and robbed Him of a life that should have been spent in His service. But they do not like to be told that they cannot compensate Him. Human pride naturally revolts against the doctrine that the heart of man is so depraved that it can do nothing itself to obtain eternal life. ' For by grace are ye saved through faith ; and that *not of yourselves*, it is the gift of God ; not of works lest any man should boast.'† The few puny incomplete acts of righteousness which men can offer God as compensation for the great debt of sin they owe Him, are like a ruined man insulting his creditors by offering them a few pence to cancel debts of thousands of pounds. When God deals with us in mercy, He deals right royally and bountifully. He will not forgive a mere part of a debt ; He is willing to forgive all or none. A friend of Alexander the Great once asked for ten talents, and received fifty. He said that ten were quite enough. ' True,' replied the King ; ' ten may be enough for you to accept, but not for me to give.' The greater the gift, the more worthy of a royal giver. What greater gift can men ask of the King of kings than ' the gift of God, which is eternal life ' ?

When God deals in mercy He is most bountiful, but when He deals in justice He is most exact. ' He will by no means clear the guilty.'‡ If man is proud enough to think he can get to heaven by good works, let him try. Divine justice will, however, require *perfect* obedience. ' Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.'§ Here not only perfect obedience for a time,

* Acts iv. 20. † Eph. ii. 8. ‡ Ex. xxxiv. 7. § Gal. iii. 10.

but perfect obedience continuing for ever, is insisted on. How many have struggled to render this obedience, and struggled in vain ! How many good resolutions, formed in the morning of the day, have vanished before the night !

‘ How weak the barrier of mere nature proves,
Opposed against the pleasures nature loves.’

The chain is no stronger than its weakest link ; how carefully then should a man examine his life ere risking eternal welfare on having kept the law.

The Apostle knew that there were none such, for he goes on to say, ‘ But that no man is justified by the law it is evident : for the just shall live by faith ;’* and again, ‘ The Scripture hath concluded all under sin.’† ‘ Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law ; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified ;’‡ or as it is stated in the old-fashioned language of our Prayer-Book :

‘ We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings.’§

‘ Albeit that good works which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God’s Judgment : yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring necessarily out of a true and lively faith ; insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree discerned by the fruit.’||

Christ offered to God ‘ a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction’¶ for our sins and the sins of the whole world. We utterly fail if we attempt to do the same, as Christ alone can do that. But as Divine justice will be satisfied with nothing less, man’s wisdom is shown in ceasing his puny efforts to obtain eternal life by his own righteousness, and by accepting the perfect and finished work of Christ for him on Calvary.

* Gal. iii. 11.

† Gal. iii. 22.

‡ Gal. ii. 16.

§ Art. xii. Church of England Prayer-Book.

|| Art. xi.

¶ Ch. of England Com. Service.

The question is, however, often asked, If all this is true, what, then, is the meaning of such texts as 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling'?* This text occurs in a short Epistle from St. Paul to the Phillippians, and must be taken in connection with the rest of the Epistle. No one would like to have solitary sentences taken out of their letters, and quoted as their opinion without any reference to the rest of the letter, which might give it quite a different meaning. St. Paul was writing 'to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi';† and he adds, 'whose names are in the book of life.'‡ It is very evident, then, that he was addressing those who were already true Christians. If, then, their names were 'in the book of life,' and they were 'saints in Christ Jesus,' he could hardly have meant them to work to obtain salvation. If words mean anything, they were already in possession of that gift. The words '*your own* salvation,' moreover, imply possession. Doubtless the instruction the Apostle meant to convey to them was, that they were to work out, cultivate, and improve what they already possessed, so as to bring forth the 'fruits of the Spirit,' which are 'love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.'§ He exhorted them not to rest contented with merely being saved, but to 'press forward toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'|| No advice and counsel can be more needed than this in the present day of easy indifference to the claims of religion.

There are many in the present day who take an intermediate path by maintaining that salvation is not entirely by faith, nor entirely by works, but by both combined. The Apostle meets this very argument by saying, 'If by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.'¶ Grace is the free undeserved gift of God.

* Phil. ii. 12.

† Phil. i. 1.

‡ Phil. iv. 3.

§ Gal. v. 22.

|| Titus iii. 8.

¶ Rom. xi. 6.

‘For by grace are ye saved through faith ; and that not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God.’ If salvation, then, is a gift from God, we cannot work to earn it. If it is not a gift from God, then it assumes more the form of wages, with which God will reward us for having worked for Him. But we know it is a gift ; therefore salvation is a thing we may accept, but cannot work to obtain. ‘Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.’* To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.†

* Rom. iii. 28.

† Rom. iv. 5.

CHAPTER VII.

FAITH.

‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’—
ACTS xvi. 31.

IF a person realizes that he is a sinner, that the penalty of sin is death, and that he cannot escape that penalty by his own works, he will naturally ask, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ No better answer can be given him than was given by St. Paul to the gaoler at Philippi. But perhaps the inquirer will say, as many do, ‘I never doubted the fact that Christ lived and died, and was the founder of the Christian faith. Is this belief anything new?’ To this it must be answered that the word ‘believe’ is perhaps better understood by the word ‘trust.’ We are called upon to trust Christ to save us. It is quite possible to believe the generally accepted Christian doctrine without being saved. ‘The devils believe, and tremble.’* They believe it to be terribly true that Christ died to overcome sin, and that one day He will reign supreme. But there is no trust implied in their faith; on the contrary, they tremble at the thought. Trust gives confidence, happiness, ‘joy and peace.’

This believing, or trusting, then, is nothing new. It is not the calling out of new energies hitherto unexercised. All men have faith in something or other. Some have great faith in their friends, some in themselves; others have great faith in

* James ii. 19.

riches, pleasures, or literary attainments to make them happy. We are asked to 'have faith in God,'* to exercise the faith we already have in the right channel. Without faith a child would not know its parents. We exercise the most implicit faith in our fellow-men every day of our lives. We read of a terrible catastrophe in the newspaper, and believe it implicitly. A perfect stranger meets us, and says he has just seen a burning house, and is at once believed. The Apostle says, 'If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.'† This is undeniable, for men and newspapers are not only liable to error, but sometimes intentionally deceive. This God has never done. Yet if we so readily receive the 'witness of men,' poor fallible creatures, how much more readily ought we to receive the 'witness of God.'

Nothing so pains a man who is conscious of truthfulness as to have his word doubted. If this is so with men of honour, how much more so would it be with God ! And yet day by day the unbeliever is making God a liar by doubting His Word. 'He that believeth not God hath made him a liar.' Why ? Let us see ; 'because he believeth not the record God gave of His Son.'‡ Now to make God 'a liar,' is a very serious charge amounting to blasphemy. However much we may recoil from the thought that individually we have been guilty of this crime, we stand condemned by God's Word. Let us ask what is this record, and then we shall know whether or not we have been guilty of this charge. We have it in the next verse : 'This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.' Each one can tell whether or not he has the eternal life, by the 'witness in himself' spoken of in the preceding verse. If we have it not, we are guilty of making Him a liar. Unbelief is the greatest of all sins, because from it arise all sins.

The Evil One himself is the author of unbelief, and this was the cause of Eve falling into an act of disobedience. Quite apart

* Mark xi. 22.

† 1 John v. 9.

‡ 1 John v. 10.

from the act of rebellion possibly taught in the eating of the forbidden fruit, had Eve only fully believed that what God had forbidden to her was not for her good, she would not have disobeyed God. However little able to understand what harm there could be in the deed, had she only possessed perfect confidence in God, she might have known that it was no mere arbitrary command on the part of her Creator. He had given her quite sufficient proof of His loving care of her, and she ought to have trusted, though possibly she could not understand the reason. A chemist may tell his son not to touch some explosive material ; if the son has implicit confidence in the wisdom and love of his father, he will know that nothing would be denied him without some good cause. If he does not trust his father, he may think him arbitrary in this single prohibition, though all else may be allowed him. He cannot understand why it should be forbidden. He disobeys, and suffers the consequences. Want of confidence in his father was the cause of the act of disobedience. All else was secondary. Some day perhaps God will reveal to us why this particular fruit was forbidden. Enough for us to know that it was a test of the confidence of Eve, and her sin originated in not trusting her Creator.

If this is the case, need we be surprised that the condition, if we may so use the word, of reconciliation is belief or trust in God's only appointed Son ? Every father likes to feel that his children have confidence in him. Much more so, then, does our Heavenly Father desire it. The representative forefather of the human race failed to show this confidence. God then sent His Son to suffer the penalty, and to gather out a people who will give Him their allegiance and confidence. Some think to satisfy God with good works, others with a grand ceremonial and ritual. But no amount of good works or worship will compensate for a want of confidence. No loving husband will be satisfied with mere attention to external duties on the part

of his wife, if he felt that she had lost all confidence in him. He desires love and confidence ; for he well knows that if he possesses these, all external duties will follow in their right place.

Many take a very superficial view of sin, and look on it more as a disease which can easily be cured if only the sinner will give his mind and attention to it; like a trifling malady hitherto neglected, but which with a little care could easily be cured. Once let them attempt to throw off the yoke of sin, and then will they find what a terrible power it has. As an eminent preacher* has said, 'A dead fish can float down the stream, but it requires a living fish to stem the tide and go against the stream.' As long as a man goes along in the direction of his desires and inclinations, he does not know what a power they have over him. Let him try to go in the opposite direction, and at once he will find out how much he is in need of Divine assistance. And it is not till he has been brought to see how helpless are all his endeavours to live a perfectly holy life that he will care to trust another to save him. This is the work of the Spirit, who alone can convince of helplessness and sin, and show the necessity for trust in another. As long as a man thinks he can save himself by swimming, so long will he neglect the life-buoy. Those who are eager to clutch it, are those who know that they cannot be saved without it.

Very few realize that unbelief in itself is a sin ; and yet we are told, 'he that believeth not is *condemned already*, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.'† It is not that some day in the future he will be condemned, but that he is condemned already. Many think that after death God will reckon with them, putting the good actions against the bad ones, and let Christ make up the deficiency. They forget that the trial has already taken place, and that they are under sentence of death. Their condition is that of the

* Moody.

† John iii. 18.

man justly sentenced to death and awaiting his execution, but who has been offered a reprieve on certain conditions.

The Jews came once to our Saviour and said, 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?'* They wanted to know how to please God. Jesus answered and said unto them, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.' In other words, He told them that if they really wanted to please God, they could do so in no better way than by trusting in Christ as their Saviour. In the same Gospel it says, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.'† Everything seems, then, to depend on the word 'believe.' In this text two classes are placed side by side in vivid and awful contrast. Eternity is at stake! Heaven or hell depends on the distinction, which is only this: the one believes, the other believes not.

A young man was once discussing this subject with an old clergyman. The young man said, 'Well, if that is true, I can believe and do what I like, and yet be saved.' 'True,' replied the old clergyman, 'do what you like; but if yours is a real saving faith, you will *like* to do what God likes.' When once we really do believe in Christ as our Saviour, our hearts are changed, and henceforth His service is no longer a duty to be performed *volens volens*, but it is our highest pleasure. In believing, we partially realize what Christ has given up for us, in taking on Himself the form of sinful man, and coming down into this world to be tempted and ill-treated and to suffer an ignominious death upon the cross, surrounded with malefactors and murderers, who were cruelly taunting Him. If we only think on how much He has done for us, we cannot help loving Him. 'If ye love Me,' as He said to His disciples, 'keep My commandments.'‡ It is useless to talk of loving a person, if we do not do our best to please him.

* John vi. 29.

† John iii. 36.

‡ John xiv. 15.

St. James, in his Epistle, enforces this doctrine of a living faith, which must show itself by good works. He says, 'Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.* Like the withered-up tree that bears no fruit because it is dead, so is the professing Christian who speaks of his faith but gives no proof of it in his life. This is very clearly brought out in the text, 'What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works ?† Can faith save him ?‡ In St. James's day many, as in the present day, made a great profession of faith, but gave no signs of having faith, in their daily life. A man may *say* he has faith without having it. Can such faith save him? The true faith that saves is the faith that gives good evidence of its existence by bearing fruit. No man can believe without the working of the Holy Spirit; and if the Spirit works in a man it changes his whole nature.

Believing begets gratitude, gratitude begets love, love begets obedience. A story is told of a mother with a child in a burning ship. The boats were putting off but were not able to save all on board. The poor mother was entreating the crew of the last boat to save her and the child. They replied that they were already full, but would find room for one more. She seized her child, giving him one last embrace, and dropped him into the boat, in which she might have gone herself. 'My boy,' she said, 'if you live to see your father, tell him

† 'Suppose I say, "A tree cannot be struck without thunder;" that is true, for there never is destructive lightning without thunder. But again if I say, "The tree was struck by lightning without thunder;" that is true too, if I mean that the lightning alone struck it, without the thunder striking it. Yet read the two assertions together and they seem contradictory. St. Paul says, "Faith justifies without works"; that is, faith only is that which justifies us, not works. But St. James says, "Not a faith which is without works." There will be works with faith, as there is thunder with lightning; but just as it is not the thunder but the lightning, the lightning without the thunder, that strikes the tree, so it is not the works which justify. Put it in one sentence. Faith only justifies, but not the faith which is alone. Lightning alone strikes, but not the lightning which is alone without thunder, for that is harmless summer lightning.—F. W. ROBERTSON.

* James ii. 1.

‡ James ii. 14.

that I died in your place.' That child might forget the scene, but when told of it in after years, if he believed it, would not his whole heart overflow with gratitude to that mother? Would he not love her memory? and if she had left behind any written requests and wishes, would it not be his highest pleasure to carry out those wishes? It is but a faint resemblance of what Christ has done for us. He died in our place. Is it not base ingratitude on our part not to do all we can to please Him, who loved us so much that He died for us?

Some say that they do believe and yet are not saved. Let us examine this statement. God's Word says, 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life.'^{*} Elsewhere it says, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.'[†] These, however, say they believe but have not everlasting life, nor have they the witness within. There must be something wrong; and as the Bible cannot be wrong, it is evident that these know not what true belief is. There is such a thing as an historical belief. We believe that Napoleon and Alexander lived, but that belief has no effect whatever upon our lives: this is not the faith that Christ demands. True faith appropriates Christ as its own. Many talk of Christ as 'our Saviour.' True faith goes further. He is '*my* Saviour.' Poor Mary at the sepulchre said, 'They have taken away *my* Lord.' To many it would matter little if proof could be produced that Christ never existed. It would affect them no more than proof that Alexander never lived. True faith stakes life and happiness in this world as well as that which is to come on the existence of Christ. Men have been known to rush out of court wringing their hands, saying they are ruined men. You ask them, Why? A lawsuit has gone against them. They have lost all their property and money. But after all, in the course of a few years, more or less, they must by the laws of

^{*} John iii. 36.

[†] 1 John v. 10.

nature lose it all : so that they have only lost it a few years sooner. But not so the believer. His treasure is one, which he not only can enjoy during the present life, but throughout eternity. To lose that hope would indeed make him a ruined man. This is appropriating faith, and is what Christ wants. 'I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine.*'

Some pity themselves because they cannot believe in God. They quite exonerate themselves from all blame. Who, then, is to blame? God certainly is not. 'He willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should live.' He has provided the means of escape, and says : 'O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments ! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea.†' 'O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end' !‡ Christ is certainly not to blame. He gave Himself for us. His only object for dying on the cross was that all men should be saved. With whom, then, is the blame to rest? It is, doubtless, with the evil heart of unbelief within the sinner. The sinner alone is to blame. 'If your child, whom you love so tenderly, should say, "Father, I wish I could believe you," would you not be cut to the heart by such a declaration? The more earnestly he expressed regret at his inability to believe you, the more intense would be your pain. What an awful speech for a son to address to his father, "I wish I could believe you !" You would say, "Not only does he not believe me, but he says he would do so if he could, and finds himself unable to do so. If it was an enemy who had done this, I could have borne it, but it is my child whom I love so dearly."§ If earthly parents would feel it so keenly not to be trusted, how much more so does our Heavenly Father feel it ! Not to believe is to cast an imputation on a person's character. Has our Elder Brother Jesus Christ deserved such an imputation ?

* Cant. vi. 3. † Isa. xlviii. 18. ‡ Deut. xxxii. 29. § Spurgeon.

We know what it is to trust a physician to cure us, or to trust a lawyer to conduct our case. Christ, as the Great Physician of souls, asks us to give Him the same confidence. St. Paul said, 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him.'* 'Be not slow to draw near, for His loving heart is unable to refuse you. If you will trust yourselves with the Saviour, He cannot betray or deceive your trust. Only do that, and your faith will have power over the sacred heart of the Crucified One. You know if a child trusts you—if it is only to buy a penny toy—you do not like to go home without doing it. You City men, if your little daughter trusted father to buy her something, you would not like to disappoint her. Well, and God our blessed Saviour cannot, will not disappoint His trustful children.'†

'Oh how unlike the complex works of man,
 God's easy, artless, unencumbered plan !
 No meretricious graces to beguile,
 No clustering ornaments to clog the pile ;
 From ostentation as from weakness free,
 It stands like the cerulean arch we see,
 Majestic in its own simplicity.
 Inscribed above the portal from afar,
 Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
 Legible, only by the light they give,
 Stand the soul-quickening words,
 "Believe and Live" !'

COWPER.

* 2 Tim. i. 12.

† Spurgeon.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUSES OF DELAY.

‘Slow of heart to believe.’—LUKE xxiv. 25.

THERE are many who are fully convinced that salvation is only by faith, and that there is no other means of salvation, and yet they do not believe. Something or other keeps them back, and they are ‘slow of heart to believe.’ Delays are dangerous. It is an old saying, but none the less true, that the road to hell is paved with good resolutions. Doubtless many there intended to flee from the wrath to come, but they delayed till too late. An infidel once said to a professing Christian: ‘Do you think if I only believed what you profess to believe regarding eternity hereafter, that I would risk my soul for another day in uncertainty! No, nor yet for another hour.’ Three young soldiers I knew had helped to carry a comrade who had suddenly been taken ill to the regimental hospital, and there they saw him die. When returning to barracks, two out of the three, who were decided Christian men, began to speak on the uncertainty of life, and the necessity of being prepared for death. The third one assented to all that was said, doubtless resolving some day to prepare. On the following Sunday he felt unwell, and on church parade asked leave to fall out. He went to hospital, and died on the Monday. Many other instances could easily be produced to prove the necessity for decision at once. Let

one, however, suffice. In this chapter I purpose dealing with some of the causes for delay which one most frequently hears.

‘I intend to come to Christ, but you do not know how bad I am, I must first get rid of my sins, and then I will come.’ This is certainly reversing the order of God’s plan of salvation. Surely the greater the disease, the greater the need of the physician! It is not usual to wait till the disease is cured before sending for assistance. ‘They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.’* Christ says, ‘I am not come to call the righteous, but *sinner*s to repentance.’† He meant that He did not want those who thought themselves righteous; as we are told elsewhere, ‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’‡ He did, however, want those who knew themselves to be sinners. ‘For the Son of Man is come to seek and save that which is *lost*.’§

Christ knows full well how bad we are, and declares His willingness to save us. Our sins, far from keeping us from Him, are the chief proof of our need. Had we no sins, or, rather, did we not know ourselves to be sinners, we should not know that we were ‘lost;’ we should consider ourselves ‘righteous,’ the only persons in the Bible we do not find invited. ‘Getting better,’ or getting rid of our past sins,’ expressions frequently used, are only other words for forgetting our past sins. The Bible only gives us one direction by which we can get rid of sin, and that is, ‘The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.’|| Waiting will not cleanse us, nor will the number of our past sins ever decrease.

Some there are who excuse themselves on the plea that they have not ‘repented enough’ of their past sins. They thus continue to disobey God’s command to come at once: ‘*Now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation.’¶ ‘Choose ye *this day* whom ye will serve.’** This repentance

* Matt. ix. 12.

§ Luke xix. 10.

† Matt. ix. 13.

|| 1 John i. 7.

‡ Rom. iii. 10.

** Josh. xxiv. 15.

¶ Cor. vi. 2.

which they put as an obstacle between themselves and Christ, they understand to mean sorrow for sin. Instead of coming at once to Christ, they disobey Him by remaining away while they try to work up their feelings to a state of sorrow. As long as they remain away they are rebels. The best proof of sorrow for sins would be to forsake them. The natural man who has not submitted to Christ may feel sorrow for the effects of sin, but not for sin itself. It is Christ alone who can implant true penitence, or sorrow for sin, in the hearts of His followers. It is a 'Christian grace, which regards sin with grief and a holy abhorrence.' It is needless to say that this can hardly be looked for in one who has not yet come to Christ. The true Christian alone can have it. The holier and more like his Saviour he becomes, the more of the Spirit of his Master will he obtain, and so much the more intensely will he hate sin. To delay, therefore, coming to Christ, and accepting God's gift, till one has 'repented enough,' is not unlike remaining away from the fire until one becomes warm. The sooner the sinner accepts Christ, the sooner he will learn to love Him, and the sooner he learns to love Christ, the sooner will he learn to hate that which pains his loving Saviour so much.*

To take an illustration. Some Indian Rajahs unite to throw off the English yoke. They are proclaimed rebels, and as such continue to be guilty of many acts of disloyalty. Her Majesty, however, promises to spare those who voluntarily

*The word translated "repentance" is in the Greek *μετάνοια*, the primary meaning of which is "a change of mind." It is derived from the verb *μετα-νοέω*, *μετα* meaning "a change from one state to another;" and *νοέω* meaning "to perceive, understand, think, consider." Repentance, therefore, is that change in a man's history when he turns from "dead works" (Heb. vi. 1.) "towards God" (Acts xx. 21). It is the last act of the unconverted man, as faith is the first act of the converted man; and although, therefore, the one cannot take place without the other, repentance is theoretically before faith, as in Mark i. 15. It is quite true that we cannot believe unless we repent; but it is also true that we do repent the moment that we believe. Genuine sorrow for sin (which is quite different from repentance) cannot exist in the unrenewed heart, and therefore faith must come first.—GALL.

surrender themselves. One believes the promise, while the rest disbelieve. He surrenders, but instead of being treated as he deserves, her Majesty pities him, and treats him kindly, finally restoring him to his former position. Her kindness has changed his hatred into love, and he at once feels sorry for all his past misdeeds. The application of this is easy. Sinners are all rebels. God still continues His offers of mercy. While many reject, a few accept the terms. They experience love and kindness when they know they have deserved punishment. Their hearts are thus changed towards God, and instead of loving their own ways, they learn to love His. They feel real sorrow for the sins they have committed. They do not labour to repent and be sorry, since the sorrow is spontaneous. And as day by day they learn and experience more of God's lovingkindness, the more they learn to love Him ; and the more they learn to hate that which displeases Him. God must first 'create and make in us new and contrite hearts' before we can 'worthily lament our sins.' Anxious souls should then first come to Christ, 'and submit to Him ; then they will learn to repent, and know what it is to feel genuine sorrow for sin.

Some delay coming to Christ because their motives for so doing are not as pure as they would like them. Perhaps it is from fear of going to hell, or out of a selfish desire to obtain heaven, but without any love to God, that they think about their soul's salvation. They would like the motive to be a pure one, so instead of obeying the command to come at once, they delay, with the plea that before coming they must purify their motives. As well might such attempt to purify water which flows from a polluted source.

' If foul the streamlet runs, cleanse not its course,
But find and purify its tainted source.'

Everything about the sinner before he comes to Christ must be impure. Their poor polluted hearts cannot put forth pure

motives until they have been changed by the grace of God ; so that the sooner they come to Christ to have a ' new heart ' given them, the sooner will their motives be purified. This desire to have pure motives to bring to God is but a relic of human pride and self-righteousness. As the poor sinner gets to know more of his own heart, he gradually learns that there is nothing good within, not even a good motive. The rebel accepts the terms of the Supreme Government more because he feels that it is useless contending against a stronger power, than because he loves the power to which he has hitherto been in opposition. Afterwards he gradually learns to love and respect that power, and to serve it with all his energies and with pure motives ; but at first such cannot be expected of him. Many who love God and serve Him most zealously will admit that it was not love to God that brought them to close with the offer of mercy. It many cases it was more a fear of the consequences of not loving God that led them.

This truth has been very clearly stated by one* whose words I cannot do better than quote : ' How could it be otherwise ? God made you with these fears and hopes, and He appeals to them in His Word. When he says, " Turn ye, turn ye, for *why will ye die ?*" He is appealing to your *fears*. When He sets eternal life before you and the joys of an endless kingdom, he is appealing to your *hopes*. And when He presents these motives, He expects you to be moved by them. To act upon such motives, then, cannot be wrong. Nay, not to act upon them would be to harden yourself against God's most solemn appeals. ' Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men,'† says St. Paul. It cannot be wrong to be influenced by this terror. . . . When was it otherwise ? Among the millions who have found life in Christ, who began in any other way, or started with a purely disinterested motive ? Was it not thus the gaoler began when the earthquake shook his soul, and called

* Dr. Bonar.

† 2 Cor. v. 11.

up before his conscience everlasting woe? Was it not a sense of danger and a dread of wrath that made him ask, "What shall I do to be saved?" And did the Apostle rebuke him for this? Did he refuse to answer his anxious question, because his motive was selfish? . . . There is nothing wrong in these motives. When my body is pained, it is not wrong to wish for relief. When overtaken by sickness, it is not wrong to send for a physician. You may call this selfishness, but it is a right and lawful selfishness, which He who made us what we are, and who gave us our instincts, expects us to act upon. . . . It is not wrong to dread hell, to desire heaven, to flee from torments, to desire pardon. It is Satan who ensnares you with such foolish thoughts, in order to quench every serious desire.'

A frequent expression among those who delay is, 'I want to believe, but *cannot*.' Dr. Bonar explains this very clearly in the following words: 'You are labouring under the idea that this believing is a work to be done by you, and not the simple acknowledgment of a work done by another. You would fain do something in order to get peace; and you think that if you could only do this great thing called faith, God would reward you with peace. In this view, faith is a *price* as well as a *work*; whereas it is neither, but a ceasing from work and from attempting to *pay* for salvation. Faith is not a climbing of the mountain, but a ceasing to attempt it and allowing Christ to carry you up in His arms. . . . Your inability, then, does not lie in the impossibility of your performing aright this great act of believing, but of ceasing from all such self-righteous attempts to perform any act, or do anything whatever, in order to your being saved.

'The Spirit's work is not to enable a man to *do* something which will save him or help to save him, but so to detach him from all his own exertions and performances, whether good, bad or indifferent, that he shall be content with the salvation

which the Saviour of the lost has finished. Remember, that which you call *inability*, God calls your *guilt*; and this inability is a *wilful* thing. It was not put into you by God; for He made you with the full power of doing everything He tells you to do. You disobey and disbelieve willingly. No one forces you to do either. Your rejection of Christ is the *free and deliberate choice of your own will*.

'Is it really the "*cannot*" that is keeping you back from Christ? No, it is the "*will not*." You have not got the length of the *cannot*. It is the *will not* that is the real and present barrier. "Ye *will not* come to Me, that ye might have life."* "Whosoever *will*, let him take the water of life freely."† If your heart could speak out it would say, "Well, after all, I *cannot*, and God *will not*. I am doing all I can to believe, but the Spirit will not help me." And what is that but saying, "I have a hard-hearted God to deal with, who will not help or pity me"? Whatever your rebellious heart may say, Christ's words are true, "Ye *will not*." What He spoke, when weeping over impenitent Jerusalem, He speaks to you, "I would, but *ye would not*."‡

There are some who do not believe, and yet excuse themselves for not at once obeying God by saying that they are '*praying for power to believe*.' There is something wrong here. God commands all men to believe. With the command, He also gives the power to obey. When our Saviour was about to cure the man with a withered hand, he said, 'Stretch forth thine hand.'§ Of course the man had no power to stretch it out; and he might have waited and asked Christ to give him power. He, however, obeyed the command immediately, and found that with the command power was given. Praying for power to believe is too often only another excuse for delay. When a father gives a command, he expects *immediate* obedience. Our Heavenly Father expects no less from us

John v. 40. † Rev. xxii. 17. ‡ Matt. xxiii. 37. § Matt. xii. 13.

when He 'commandeth all men everywhere to repent,* and to 'believe on Him whom He hath sent.'† The excuse that we are waiting and praying for power to believe will not avail us. God demands obedience first; and one who will not hear and obey, even though he prays, should bear in mind that he who 'turneth away his ear from hearing the law, *even his prayer shall be abomination* to the Lord.'‡

Prayer must be either of a *believing* or an *unbelieving* nature. In saying this I fully recognise the fact that there is a class on whom 'the glorious light of the Gospel has not *fully* shone. They are believers, but have no joyful consciousness of their reconciliation with God. They do not 'come boldly unto the throne of grace.'§ Nevertheless they are believers, and God accepts their prayers as such, though they know it not. They will soon change their prayers into 'Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief.' 'Lord, increase my faith.'|| The promise to those who pray in faith, whether that faith is weak or strong, is, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive.'¶ But one who is only praying for power to believe, is not yet a believer, and therefore cannot pray in faith. There is no promise in the Bible that *unbelieving* prayer will be answered. On the contrary, it says, 'Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.'** 'How then shall they call on Him in *whom they have not believed*?†† The question then arises, Should men cease to pray because they have not believed? Certainly not. 'Men ought always to pray.' The fact of a man having failed to obey one of God's commands, does not release him from the obligation to obey another. The charge against the 'workers of iniquity' is that they 'call not upon the Lord.'‡‡ The prophet pronounces God's wrath 'upon

* Acts xvii. 30.

† John vi. 29.

‡ Prov. xxviii. 9.

§ Heb. iv. 16.

|| Mark ix. 24.

¶ Matt. xxi. 22.

** James i. 6.

†† Rom. x. 14.

‡‡ Psa. xiv. 4.

the families that call not on Thy name.’* But while urging on all the importance of prayer, it cannot be too clearly pointed out that continuing to pray for power to believe, instead of believing at once, is to continue in disobedience to God. None are asked to give up praying; but all are invited to exercise the power which God gives, when He gives the command to believe at once.

Among the many causes of delay, a very prominent one is the unwillingness to give up some known sin.

A missionary in India once told me that he knew a rich lady who for years had been apparently earnestly seeking the truth, but could not find peace. He did his best for her, spoke to her, explained over and over again certain difficulties, and prayed with her. But all to no avail. He could not understand why it was she could find no joy and peace in believing. One day he was staying in her house. Again he went over the same ground, but with no better results. He spoke on the necessity of a perfect surrender, and warned her against keeping back anything in confessing to God. She assured him that she knew of nothing hindering her from a full surrender. He retired to rest, and prayed for her. His room was just beneath hers. That night he was startled by a falling body passing his window. The household were aroused. The sad truth was too apparent. She had attempted suicide by throwing herself out of window. Though much injured, she was not killed. Some time afterwards she told him the cause. She had either destroyed or concealed her father’s will, which gave her sister an equal share in his estate. A former will of his had been produced, which gave her the whole estate and disinherited her sister. Her pride prevented her from making a full confession of her crime, and making reparation to her injured sister. She had tried in vain to appease conscience by attention to the outward forms and ceremonies of worship. She had given

* Jer. x. 25.

largely in charities, and had obtained the name of being a very religious, charitable person. She became really anxious about her soul, but could not find joy and peace. 'If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*' The conversation she had had that day with the missionary convinced her where the fault lay, and showed her that God would not accept her while continuing to live in sin. But her pride prevented the disclosure. Rather than confess, she had been driven to the terrible expedient of attempting to destroy herself.

Many inquirers are kept lingering near the line of demarcation, halting between two opinions from deciding at once, and thereby enjoying true peace, by the relics of self-righteousness. They know salvation is to be obtained by believing in Christ, and yet they cling to human merit just a little. They are too timid to launch forth, trusting to Jesus only. A very good illustrative story is told of a lady who was in great distress of mind—she could not find peace. One night in agony of mind she knelt down, resolved not to rise till she was at peace. Thus she fell asleep, worn out with physical and mental striving. She dreamt she fell over a precipice, and in falling caught hold of a twig. In this dangerous position she cried out, 'Oh, save me!' A voice from below said, 'Let go the twig and I will save you.' This she would not do, but continued her appeal for help. The voice again said, 'I cannot save you unless you let go the twig.' She let go, and was saved.† Her joy at being saved awoke her. The application came home to her. She felt that her own doings were the twig to which she had been clinging, and that it was her pride which had kept her from letting go. When once she gave up all reliance on her own merits she found herself 'safe in the arms of Jesus.'

* Psa. lxvi. 18.

† S. M. Haughton.

CHAPTER IX.

SUBSTITUTION.

'He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.'—2 COR. v. 21.

PERHAPS no aspect of the work of Christ comes home so clearly to the inquirer as that of substitution. The meaning of the above text on first reading is not quite apparent to the ordinary reader. It should be read thus: 'He (God) hath made Him (Christ), who knew no sin, to be sin for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' For 'to be sin' read 'to be sin-bearer.' Christ was not made a sinful person, but He was made the representative sin-bearer of the aggregate sin of the whole world. As our representative our sins were made over to Him, and His righteousness was made over to us. 'The innocent was punished voluntarily for the guilty, that the guilty might be gratuitously rewarded as if innocent.'* 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.† This was foretold of Him by the prophet, 'He (God) hath laid on Him (Christ) the iniquity of us all.‡

To understand this more clearly, let us go back to the fall of man. When God made man He made him perfect. God gave him many blessings, but demanded perfect obedience. He, as it were, entered into a contract with him. The penalty of the breach of contract was, 'Thou shalt surely die.§ Man

* Faussett. † 1 Peter iii. 18. ‡ Isa. liii. 6. § Gen. ii. 17.

broke the contract. The unbelief, or want of implicit confidence in God's commands, led to disobedience. God could not go back from His word. The penalty of sin must be borne. Had He forgiven Adam without having the penalty inflicted, it would have shown a contempt for His own laws. His merciful character would have outweighed His sense of justice. His word had been given that death was to be the penalty of disobedience. So the penalty must be suffered. God is perfect, and consequently all His characteristics are perfect. We cannot understand any one of them outweighing any one of the others. In a perfect Being all must be perfectly balanced. God is a loving God: 'He willeth not the death of a sinner.' When man sinned, had God then and there inflicted the penalty, His sense of justice would have outweighed His characteristic of love and mercy. His intense hatred of the disobedience of the sinner must be reconciled with His intense love of that sinner. In other words, sin must be punished, but the sinner might be spared. Love and justice are then reconciled by finding a substitute who will bear the penalty, thus sparing the sinner: 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'^{*} This is what St. Paul meant when he said, 'that He might be just, and yet the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.'[†] The same thought is given by the Psalmist—'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.'[‡] These two apparently irreconcilable characteristics—love and justice—are reconciled. The penalties of sin are not remitted, Divine Justice demands and gets her dues, but the punishment is borne by a substitute.

Some there are who cannot understand how merit can be transferred from one to another. 'Deservedness,' they say, 'is from its nature untransferable.' But here a tremendous diffi-

^{*} John iii. 16.

[†] Rom. iii. 26.

[‡] Ps. lxxxv. 10.

culty arises. Sin deserves death ; and if deservedness cannot be transferred, salvation is impossible. What is to be done ? 'The soul that *sins* shall die.' All have sinned. Is there no salvation for anyone ? Though there are difficulties connected with the doctrine of the transfer of sin from the guilty to the innocent, if we deny the doctrine we get into much greater difficulties.

'When we say that merit may be transferred, we do not mean that this may be done in any and every case. If no previous relation has been established between the parties whereby one is constituted the representative of the other, the merit or demerit of the one cannot be legally, and therefore justly, imputed to the other. To such a case the principle that the soul that sins shall die is strictly applicable. But where a relation has been established, where one has been constituted the representative of another in any transaction, the merit or demerit of the representative is legally and justly imputed to the party or parties whose representative he is. For example, had Adam not been constituted the head and representative of his posterity, the guilt of his sin could not have been imputed to them. Similarly, had Christ not been made the Surety and Substitute of his children, the children that God had given Him, the merit of His obedience unto death could not have been imputed to them. It is the covenant made with Adam and with Christ, in virtue of which they are constituted the heads and representatives of their respective seeds, that makes the transfer in both cases legal and just. Hence the real question comes to be, not whether merit may or may not be transferred, but whether God had a *right* to make such covenants. Are we prepared to challenge the right of the Sovereign of the Universe to make what arrangements He pleases for His own glory and the good of His creatures ? Would it not be much better to say with Paul, when expounding an equally mysterious subject : "Nay but, O man, who art

thou that repleist against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"*

According to the laws of our country, if an unmarried woman contracts debts and cannot pay them, she has to suffer the penalty of the law herself. But in the case of a married woman, it is the husband who, as the head and legal representative, is held responsible. So in spiritual things, when the sinner is united by faith to Christ the Heavenly Bridegroom, the penalty of his sins is borne by Christ, his representative. But the sinner who is not united to Christ has to suffer the penalty himself.

It will be seen from this doctrine of substitution, that it is not a matter of weak or of strong faith that saves the sinner. It is faith that unites the sinner to Christ. That faith may be large, or it may be as small as a grain of mustard-seed; it may be strong, or it may be weak; but if it is a real faith it unites the sinner to Christ, who then becomes his surety. The timid believer should ever pray, 'Lord, increase my faith,' not to make him any safer, but to enable him to realize his safety. Though his safety does not depend on the strength of his faith, yet his happiness does very much. 'Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God.' But if ours is a weak faith we are ever looking at ourselves, at our walk, at our good deeds. These bring no consolation to the troubled soul; the more he looks at himself, the more sin he finds within, and consequently the more distressed he gets. Strong faith, however, looks away from self, to Christ the Substitute. It knows that all is imperfect within, but grasps the fact that the Substitute is perfect; God has declared 'Thou art My beloved Son, in Thee I am well-pleased.'† Strong faith says 'Well, if God declares Himself well-pleased and satisfied with my substitute, that is sufficient for me. God is the offended party. I could never compensate Him, but if He is satisfied with my sub-

* Whitton.

† Luke iii. 22.

stitute, why should I doubt any more?' Thus his faith grows stronger, and he goes on from strength to strength.

The work of Christ has been divided into two parts, theologically termed 'Christ's work *for* us,' and 'Christ's work *in* us.' Much confusion has arisen and much anxiety has been given to seeking souls from not clearly distinguishing between these. Christ's work *for* us is complete already. He died for us as our Substitute, and nothing can be added to that work by the believer; and it is on that finished work that his salvation depends. One day he may feel peaceful, spiritually-minded, and happy; another day he might feel quite the reverse; but his salvation is just as sure on the one day as on the other. The work was complete when our Saviour uttered the words 'It is finished,' on the cross. That work is quite independent of the feelings or of the failures of the believer. Those who cannot realize this will be tossed about without any 'sure and certain hope' for an anchor of the soul. Our feelings are very often dependent on the state of the weather, on our digestive organs, on our whole physical nature, in fact. Our salvation is not dependent on any of these things connected with the earthly tabernacle, but only on the substitute—Christ.

The work of Christ *in* us is a sanctifying work, a more gradual process of 'purifying us to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' There will be an end to the conflict with sin; but that very conflict can never be carried on with energy till the individual first realizes that the work of Christ *for* him is completed, and that, though possibly after many failings and mistakes, he will in the end prove 'more than conqueror' through the 'Captain of his Salvation.' No better stimulant can be given to the soldier to enable him to fight, endure hardships and fatigues, than to know that he is on the winning side, and to know that though now and then he may be cast down, yet eventually he must succeed.

Some seem to rather pride themselves on that somewhat

strange anomaly, a doubting faith. They think it to be rather a sign of humility and holiness, and quite forget that it casts a reflection on Christ as the Substitute, and is therefore most dishonouring. What has He done that we should treat Him in a way we would treat no earthly friend? If His work is not a finished work, we have indeed good cause to doubt; but if it is finished, we should tremble at our presumption in daring to doubt. It is not doubting ourselves, for our salvation is not dependent on ourselves, but it is doubting Him. As a preacher has said, 'A little doubt is like a little stone which has got into the pedestrian's boot.' However small, it causes pain, and hinders him on his journey. Some seem to cultivate these doubts and to take every opportunity of parading them. No sooner is one removed than up they bring another. We should rather pray against them, and with all our other sins take them to Christ and ask for power over them. They are but the suggestions of the evil one to hinder us in 'running the race set before us.' We are commanded to 'lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.'*

Though it does not affect his safety, nothing so impairs the working power of a believer as to have doubts about his safety. The lifeboat rescues two men who have been tossed about after a shipwreck in a rough sea. The one has a constitution physically weak. Though safe, he cannot realize it. He grasps the sides of the boat, half-expecting every wave to wash him away. His whole nervous system has been unstrung. He is like a dead-weight in the boat, doing no good. Not so the stronger man; once in the lifeboat he feels secure. His first thought is to lend a hand to pull an oar, or throw a rope, to help to save another. The timid one, however, gets just as safely to shore, but there is this difference—he is not so useful. So in spiritual things, two believers are equally safe in Christ. But the one of strong faith, with the full assurance of faith,

* Heb. xii. 1.

generally cultivates a missionary spirit, and feeling secure himself, seeks to be the means of rescuing others. He knows his substitute is all perfection, and though all imperfection himself, he goes on his way rejoicing, telling others 'what great things the Lord has done' for him. The doubting one has the same substitute, and is just as secure, but he is not so useful; want of confidence in Christ robs him of a power the one of stronger faith possesses.

'O Christ, what burdens bowed Thy head !
Our load was laid on Thee ;
Thou stoodest in the sinner's stead,
Didst bear all ill for me.
A victim, led, Thy Blood was shed ;
Now there's no load for me.

'Death and the curse were in our cup :
O Christ, 'twas full for Thee !
But Thou hast drained the last dark drop,
'Tis empty now for me :
That bitter cup, love drank it up,
Now blessing's draught for me.

'For me, Lord Jesus, Thou hast died,
And I have died in Thee :
Thou'rt risen—my bands are all untied ;
And now Thou liv'st in me :
When purified, made white, and tried,
Thy Glory then for me.'

CHAPTER X.

GIFT OF GOD.

‘The gift of God is eternal life.’—ROM. vi. 23.

NO illustration brings forward so clearly to the mind the freedom of the Gospel as the fact that eternal life is spoken of as a gift. ‘The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Had it not been for Christ’s death, God could have had no dealing with sinful man, except as a Righteous Judge to pass sentence upon him. But now that Christ has died, and Divine justice has been satisfied, God offers every sinner a gift—eternal life. Gifts are tokens of favour, and must be distinguished from mere wages, which are the reward of labour done. Had salvation been offered to man for his good works, it would have assumed more the form of compensation, or wages for work done.

But the very nature of a gift is that it is freely given. The servant can demand his wages as his legal right, but no one can claim a gift. If salvation were to be obtained by works, we could demand it from God; and when received, as we should only have received our due, our hearts would not go forth in loving gratitude. Not only so, but there would be an element of self-glory, which God has carefully provided against, lest we, like the Jews, should vaunt ourselves, saying ‘Mine own hand hath saved me.’ While none can claim eternal life, everyone can accept it as a gift from God. The devil pays his servants wages—‘the wages of sin is death’—but God *gives* His servants eternal life.

The wonder is that any should reject the offer. It is not at all an uncommon thing to see beggars asking for money, but who ever saw a rich man pleading with a beggar to accept a treasure? And what are all earthly treasures compared to the 'one pearl of great price'? God's Holy Spirit is, nevertheless, continually pleading with us in such words as 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?*' 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.†

A story is told of a poor woman who wanted to get some grapes for a poor sick child. She went to the head gardener of a nobleman's house, and offered him half-a-crown for a bunch. He rebuked her, and told her that his master was not a market gardener. She went away, thinking perhaps that a little more money might have the desired effect. She brought five shillings, and was again angrily rebuked. This time, however, the nobleman's daughter overheard the conversation, and enquired about the poor sick child. She then cut off a large bunch of grapes, and presenting them to the poor woman, said: 'Though my father does not sell grapes, I am sure he would gladly *give* you some.' And thus it is with salvation. The anxious sinner thinks to purchase eternal life with works of merit. As he fails to find it, he thinks that he has not offered enough, or else that the ones he has offered are not of a sufficiently good quality, so he sets about seeking to produce more and better works. He renounces certain things which he knows are wrong, he prays more, and reads his Bible more, and endeavours to do better in the future. Now no one will

* Isa. lv. 1.

† Isa. i. 18

deny that these are all very excellent things ; but if he thus thinks to purchase heaven, God will not accept them. He will not barter eternal life for good works, but He is willing and most anxious to give the poor sinner eternal life if he will only accept it as a free gift, but not as wages in exchange for so many good works.

‘Too many, shocked at what should charm them most,
Despise the plain directions and are lost ;
“Heaven on such terms !” they cry with proud disdain,
“Incredible, impossible, and vain ;”
Rebel because ’tis easy to obey,
And scorn for its own sake the gracious way.’*

A gift offered by an earthly monarch once refused would never be offered again. How gracious and long-suffering is our heavenly King, inasmuch as though we have long neglected His offer, yet He still continues to offer it. Truly ‘the Lord is slow to anger,’† ‘merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness.’‡ He still lingers in mercy waiting to be gracious. Let none then spurn His offer of mercy, or put off accepting it till ‘a more convenient season.’ Not to accept *at once* is to show a disregard for the gift. The starving man at once snatches at the proffered food, to prolong his life a few more years ; and shall we be less eager to accept at once that which will give us ‘eternal life’? ‘*Now* is the *accepted* time, now is the day of salvation.’§

Those who think that it is presumption for any to profess to know that they have eternal life, must surely overlook the fact that eternal life is spoken of as a gift. The meanest beggar in the world can *accept* a gift, if he can do nothing else. The more he is in want and the more he feels his want, so much the more ready is he to accept that which is offered to him. Nor have we any cause to pride ourselves on having wisely accepted what others foolishly refused. Our very willingness to accept is the work of the Spirit, who makes us willing by

* Cowper. † Nahum i. 3. ‡ Exod. xxxiv. 6. § 2 Cor. vi. 2.

revealing to us our deep need. The presumption seems to lie rather with those who spurn the proffered aid, daring to refuse God's offer of mercy, and who go on presuming to trust themselves and their own works of merit to get them to heaven eventually, rather than to trust Christ, and accept eternal life.

A story is told of an Indian and a white man, both of whom heard a missionary preaching. The native then and there accepted the free offer of salvation, and became a rejoicing Christian. The white man, though deeply interested, left the meeting without having accepted Christ. Some time after, however, he found 'joy and peace in believing.' When next he met the native he asked him how it was he had decided so quickly? His reply was: 'Oh massa, me tell you. There come along a rich man, and propose to give you a new coat. You look at your coat, and say, "I don't know, my coat is pretty good. I believe it will do a little longer." He then offer me a new coat. I look at my old blanket. I say, "This no good." I fling it right away, and accept the new coat. Just so, massa, you try to keep your own righteousness for some time; you loth to give it up; but I poor Indian had none; therefore I was glad to receive the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.' Our positions need never prove an obstacle to our salvation. It is much to be feared that man's present righteousness is a far greater hindrance, because he trusts to it instead of trusting Christ.

This is what our Saviour meant when he said: 'Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*' It is a somewhat startling text, and must have surprised those who heard Him. He could not possibly have meant that publicans and harlots were any more pleasing in the sight of God than the self-righteous. What he did mean was, that publicans and harlots being such open and profligate sinners, would not have any self-righteousness to keep

* Matt. xxi. 31.

them from feeling their need. The Pharisees, on the contrary, prided themselves on their good deeds, and were mere formalists in religion. Having lost sight of the deep and spiritual meaning of God's law, they were all the more rigid in their adherence to the outward observance of the letter. Having observed this outwardly, they felt satisfied that God was pleased with them. When Christ said that He came 'to seek and save the lost,' and that He 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,' they did not think they needed Him, and were well satisfied with their condition. Once let us realize that 'we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags ; and we all do fade as a leaf ; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away,'* and we feel at once our need, and go to Christ. He tells us : ' Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.'†

This gift of God, by its very freedom, lays a great responsibility on those who refuse to accept. However willing a person may be to bestow a gift on one he loves, the necessary condition must be that such an one is willing to accept. An officer in Ireland once said to me : ' Well, if I am to be saved, I shall be saved ; and if I am to be lost, I shall be lost.' This was his excuse for neglecting to accept the gift of God. It reminds one of the blind fatalism of the Mahometans in India, of whom it is said that if a Mahometan engine-driver saw a train on the same line coming to meet his train, he would make no effort to avoid the collision nor escape. Though possibly this may be an exaggeration, it is very characteristic of the nature of these fatalists. Lazy and indolent, every precaution is neglected, and the consequences of their neglect are attributed to God's will, or, as they express it, ' it is written in the book.' They believe it to be their ' kismet,' or fate.

Some good people, with a view of counteracting this awfully

* Isa. lxiv. 6.

† Zech. iii. 4.

blind fatalism, have perhaps gone to the other extreme, and denied the doctrine of predestination and the sovereignty of God, which is so clearly stated in Article XVII. of the Church of England Prayer Book. But unless we are prepared to adopt the other extreme of a totally blind and undirected chance, it is useless denying His sovereignty, though we are not bound to accept it in the extreme manner of fatalists. While fully sympathizing with the difficulties some have of understanding the doctrine of election, and reconciling it with our views of man's free-will and God's justice and mercy, we must remember the logical consequences that will arise out of the denial of the doctrine. Far from solving the difficulty by denial, the difficulties seem to increase.

The doctrine of predestination stares us in the face at almost every turn. 'There is scarcely a domestic circle where we may not study it as well. In the same family we may compare the vigorous frame, beautiful countenance, and brilliant intellect of one member framed to win and delight the world, with the awkward person, doltish faculties, and sickly temperament of another doomed to owe all things to the world's compassion. Philosophy finds reasons in their animal functions, in the physical temperament, or the organism of the brain. But where is the reason for their reasons? Something must have guided Nature's hand in this unequal distribution.* And so with nations and states. Is it mere chance that during a national crisis there happens to be a wise monarch, or an able statesman, at the helm, able to steer the ship of state over difficulties which have proved the wreck of other nations? Was it mere chance that placed a strong-minded, self-willed man like Henry VIII. at the head of the English nation during the Reformation, who, from the very lowest and corrupt motives, paved the way for the introduction of pure doctrine into the country; while in France the results were exactly opposite, and

* 'Christ our Example.'

massacre followed massacre till all the respectable middle-class had been killed or had emigrated, thus preparing the way for the Revolution of 1792 and Communism of 1871?

If we deny God's purposes and sovereignty in selecting one person in a family, or one nation, while rejecting another, we are shut up to the still more awful alternative that all these things are the result of mere chance. It is poor consolation to a mother to tell her that it was mere chance that her darling was the only one out of a hundred boys at school who died of a deadly and contagious malady, when the chances were the same for all. This is certainly the less acceptable of the two alternatives. If God had ordained that such should be the case, we can at least rest assured that He had some good reason for so doing, and that hereafter we shall know it, when compensation is meted out by a future life. But if these things are all mere chance, we are even denied this consolation.

Our Saviour says, 'No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.'^{*} This doctrine is recognised by the Reformers in the words, 'The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God.'[†] The natural heart of fallen man is so depraved, that he has no desire to be reconciled to God till that desire is implanted in the heart by God. Whether we believe in election or not, there are very few who do not admit that the first desire to be reconciled to God was implanted there by God, and was not the natural desire of the fleshly heart. But when we admit this, we must not on the other hand overlook the responsibility of man. He is not a mere inanimate machine, but a free agent and a responsible being. Terribly free! On his choice hangs eternity in heaven or hell.

The doctrine of God's sovereignty is one of those 'things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and

^{*} John vi. 44.

[†] Art. X., Church of England Prayer Book.

unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures unto their own destruction.* A story is told of a Scotch boatman who was rowing a couple of divinity students, who were fiercely engaged in an argument respecting God's sovereignty and man's free will. The old boatman put down the left oar still continuing to row with the right, which naturally had the effect of turning the boat round. Both young men cried out 'Row with the other oar.' The boatman began then to row with the left oar, but ceased to row with the one on the right. The consequence was that the boat turned in an opposite direction. 'Row, man, with both oars,' shouted the two young men. 'Just so,' said the boatman, 'that is what I should advise you to do, *both* are right. The Bible tells us of both God's sovereignty and man's free will. Instead of arguing about which is right use *both*. The same Bible that tells us that every good work must commence with God, throws on man the responsibility of rejecting God's offers of mercy. 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.† 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for what a man soweth, that shall he also reap.‡ 'Ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life.'§ 'Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?'|| 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near.'¶ 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, and ye would not.'** 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'†† Both truths are stated with a startling plainness. To many these statements seem almost irreconcilable, and hard and fast human definitions have certainly not helped us in the solution of the difficulty. The same God that ordains us to eternal life, also ordains what our state shall be in this world, whether rich or poor, clever or stupid, high or low,

* Peter iii. 16.

† Josh. xxiv. 15.

‡ Gal. vi. 7.

§ John v. 40.

|| Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

¶ Isa. lv. 6.

** Matt. xxiii. 37.

†† John vi. 37.

whether we shall die of hunger or not. Those who would shift the responsibility of their soul's salvation from themselves to God, do not show the same passiveness in temporal things, nor do they fold their hands, saying, 'If I am to be rich, I shall be rich;' or, 'If I am to die of hunger, I shall die.' If men do not show such indifference, and will not be governed by such a blind fate in temporal things, why should they act otherwise in things that belong to their eternal peace?

It is to be feared that indifference is the true cause of fatalism; and certain it is that, though the seeker after truth knows it not, his very willingness to accept God's gift is implanted by the Holy Spirit. The Psalmist says, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power.*' It is really the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit that makes us desire the 'beauty of holiness;' and on the other hand, it is pride that keeps us from accepting God's gift. Unless men feel their need, they will not accept. 'Thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.†' The more destitute a beggar is, the more eager he is to accept a gift. And yet some assume the form of humility, and say, 'I am not fit to be saved.' In reality it is pride, and not humility, that keeps such from accepting God's gift. They have yet to learn how utterly destitute they are. The lower down they come in their own estimate, the nearer they get to the only qualification God requires:

' Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him.'

* Ps. cx. 3.

† Rev. iii. 17.

CHAPTER XI.

REDEMPTION.

'Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.'—TITUS ii. 14.

I NOW purpose saying something on the subject of redemption. Many frequently apply the expression to Christ of 'our Redeemer,' without fully understanding the extent of its meaning. 'To redeem,' literally means 'to buy back,' 'to pay a ransom,' 'to relieve from captivity by a price.' Our text represents both aspects of Christ's work as a Redeemer. 'He gave Himself for us,' that is, He not only paid the price of our redemption from the bondage of the Evil One, but He Himself was the price.

To understand this more fully, we must realize the meaning of that text, 'I am carnal, sold under sin.*' The sinner is represented as a slave to the devil, serving him with all his energies and powers. The Evil One is represented as 'the accuser of our brethren . . . which accused them before our God day and night.†' Though the father of lies himself, he knows God will not lie; and as God has declared, 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die,‡' the Great Accuser demands that Divine justice should hand us over to him, to whom we have sold ourselves captives. Under the Mosaic law it was allowed that a man might be sold for debts as a slave. The figure used must have come home to the Jews with great force, as well as to the Romans themselves, among whom a similar law was still in existence at the time of St. Paul's writing. They could so well

* Rom. vii. 14.

† Rev. xii. 10.

‡ Ezek. xviii. 4.

understand the case of a man, reckless of all consequences, contracting debt just to amuse himself in the present. Gradually the debt would become overwhelming; and having parted with all he had, the man would deliberately sell himself as a slave. His creditors would have a just and legal claim over him. They could fully understand that Satan would justly claim his own captives.

But under the Mosaic dispensation there was this restriction to the harshness of the law: 'After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him.'* Thus, in type, was the work of Christ set forth as a Redeemer. No man could redeem himself, however hard he worked. All the profit from his labour would belong to his master. But though unable to redeem himself, his brother might redeem him. Christ became the Son of Man, the embodied representative of humanity, and of the whole human race, our Elder Brother, and 'gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us.' The sinner had accumulated a debt of sin which he could never pay off. That debt might increase, but it could never decrease. By law, the sinner must pay the penalty with his life; but Christ 'gave Himself for us.' He redeemed us by paying the debt. A story is told of a poor bedridden woman, to whom a visitor often went to explain the plan of salvation. The woman could not understand the work of Christ. During one of the visits a knock was heard at the door, and the poor woman said she knew it was her landlord come to demand his rent, and she had nothing to pay, and nothing to look forward to but the workhouse. The visitor slipped out and asked the landlord how much was due, paid the amount, and received the receipt. On returning, the poor old woman was found much agitated, fearing the worst results. The visitor then handed her the receipt, and told her that the debt was paid. Gradually the truth dawned upon her that what the visitor had

* Lev. xxv. 48.

kindly done for her on this occasion, was exactly what Christ had done for her soul. He had paid the debt of sin which she could never have done.

This, however, only partially illustrates Christ's work. His love is shown in the fact that He gave Himself as the ransom. A man might pay his brother's debts and thus redeem him from slavery, without any great act of self-denial on his part. But, if he should give himself as a slave in the place of his brother, so that he might thus be set free, the proof of his love would be still greater. But the proof of the love of our Elder Brother is greater yet. He gave His life for us. Nothing short of this would satisfy Divine justice. Sin must be expiated, for 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission.*' As man could not pay his own debt, if that debt was not paid by another, he would be cast into hell, and our Saviour said 'Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.†' This he never could do.

The perfect God and perfect man bore the penalty in a concentrated form of the sins of the whole world—a thing that no angel, or mere man, could have done. No man is perfectly sinless himself. Man cannot even bear the penalty of his own sin, far less that of others. Nothing short of the Divinity of the perfect man could have saved him from being consumed. Many see in the altar of the burnt offering a type of Christ in the perfect God and perfect man. The altar was made of wood, overlaid 'with brass.†' Had the brass not been there the fire would have consumed the wood. On the other hand, had the altar been all of brass, it would have been heavy, and unadapted to the pilgrimage life in the wilderness. It had to be of wood and brass. Had Christ been only a perfect man, or an angel, the Divine wrath, on account of His intense hatred of sin, would have completely consumed Him. He could not have borne it. His Divinity alone sustained Him.

* Heb. ix. 22.

† Matt. v. 26.

‡ Lev. xxvii. 1.

On the other hand, had He been a perfect God alone, He would not have been adapted to the wants of poor sinful man. The poor sinner could not have approached Him with any degree of confidence. Poor Job, who had not the same light as Christians in the present day possess regarding a mediator, seems to have felt this want: 'Neither is any daysman (*margin*, umpire) betwixt us, that he might lay his hand upon us both. Let Him take His rod away from me, and let not His fear terrify me. Then would I speak and not fear Him.*' Job could not meet God on equal terms, so long as God dealt with him on the footing of His Almighty power. The poor sinner needs a mediator between God and Himself. 'There is one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.†' That Mediator is one 'who was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.‡' He suffered the penalty of our sins when 'He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us.§'

When He redeems us from the bondage of sin He comes and reigns in our hearts, giving us power to overcome sin, 'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.¶' Hitherto sin has therein reigned supreme. Now Christ reigns, and supplies all our wants. He does not take us out of prison merely, and then leave us to get on the best way we can, but He undertakes for us. He not only redeemeth our 'life from destruction,' but He crowneth us 'with lovingkindness and tender mercies.' His object is to 'purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' The first step is redemption. He finds us, as He found the Israelites, slaves in bitter bondage. To them He said: 'I have broken the bonds of your yoke, and made you go upright.¶¶' 'I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots.**' The earthen pots of Egypt were

* Job ix. 33. † 1 Tim. ii. 5. ‡ Heb. iv. 5. § Titus ii. 14.
 ¶ 2 Cor. x. 5. ¶ Lev. xxvi. 13. ** Psa. lxxxii. 6.

a fit type of the base and ruinous drudgery to which Satan, our oppressor, has reduced us as bondslaves.

I once heard of a kind-hearted Englishman who was present at an auction of slaves. One poor girl was put up for auction to be sold to the highest bidder. He had compassion on her, and bid against the others for her. The price went higher and higher. He hesitated for a moment at the enormous price, and then went on, and finally purchased her. She, not knowing his intention, followed him home as indifferently as any other slave-owner. In her opinion, all alike were cruel task-masters. When he reached home, however, he explained to her that he had only purchased her to save her from a life of sin, and that now she was free. He had redeemed her from slavery by paying, at a great sacrifice to himself, the full price, and he had a perfect right to set her free. At first, she did not at all take in the meaning of being free; but when she fully realized it, her gratitude burst forth in overwhelming love to one who had been so kind. She fell down at his feet and begged to be allowed to follow him all her life, and to serve him as a daughter would her father. Could there be any comparison between the whole-hearted service of such a redeemed one, working only out of mere gratitude, and the service of an ordinary slave?

‘I would not work to save my soul,
For that my Lord hath done,
But I would work like any slave,
From love to God’s dear Son.’

St. Paul, in exhorting the early Christians to dedicate themselves to God’s service, says: ‘Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit,’*

How contrary this is to the legal teaching of some, which is, ‘If you do well you will go to heaven; if not, you will go to hell.’ What a caricature of God’s truth! There is no life of

* 1 Cor. vi. 20.

liberty in such a doctrine. Salvation is put as a possible thing, attainable at the end of a long life, as a sort of goal that may be reached after much striving. God's order is the reverse of this. He puts salvation at the beginning of the Christian life. He begins with us, as He did with the Children of Israel, by redeeming us out of captivity. 'Being then made free (or justified) from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.' The Apostle then goes on to say, 'As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity : even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.'* In other words, now being redeemed, serve Christ, your new master, as earnestly and whole-heartedly as once you served the Devil, your old master. 'The Lord looseth the prisoners.'† He gives liberty and life to us, and then 'We love Him because He first loved us.'‡

It is through the redemption of Christ that we are justified in God's sight. 'Being justified freely by His grace, *through the redemption* that is in Christ Jesus.'§ This is a very important truth to realize. A man may be forgiven an offence or a debt without being justified. For instance, a landlord may have compassion on a tenant who cannot pay his rent, and forgive him the consequences of non-payment. The tenant is forgiven by the landlord, but he is not justified. The tenant cannot face the landlord again on the same terms as if he had paid the debt. There must ever be that feeling of indebtedness which strikes at the root of all independence. But had that tenant's brother paid the debt, the tenant would be not only out of debt, but he would be justified in the eyes of the landlord. True, he would be only indebted to a brother, instead of to his landlord. But there is a vast difference in being indebted to a comparatively strange landlord, and being only indebted to a brother with whom there already exists ties of affection, relationship, and love, which are but deepened

* Rom. vi. 18. † Psa. cxlvi. 7. ‡ 1 John iv. 19. § Rom. iii. 24.

by gratitude. Divine justice can demand no more from the sinner, as he is justified. The Elder Brother has paid the debt. God will not punish two for the same offence. Christ has already suffered—so that the sinner is free.

One can understand a kind-hearted monarch who had just come to the throne, and was inexperienced in governing, taking a lenient view of crime, and pardoning all the culprits in prison. It would encourage all the bad men to continue in their evil deeds, and life and property would soon cease to be secure. Law would be held up to derision, and might would very soon become right. The consequences would be that the king might lose his throne by internal rebellion. Experience shows that law needs to be balanced with justice, and that mercy needs to be tempered with righteousness, so that the guilty may not be treated as innocent. So, in God's spiritual kingdom, it would, humanly speaking, never do for Him to disregard disobedience to His laws. He cannot forgive sin. Justice demands the penalty. But the penalty being paid by another, He can and does account the sinner 'justified.' He is accounted righteous, not because he is righteous, for 'by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight,'* but because His legal representative obeyed the law. We are accounted righteous on account of the righteousness of Christ, which is imparted to us as if it were our own righteousness. 'By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.'† We are clothed in the robe of righteousness woven by Christ Himself on earth. We are told that Abraham's faith in God's promises 'was imputed to him for righteousness.. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him : but *for us also*, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.'‡

* Rom. iii. 20.

† Rom. v. 18.

‡ Rom. iv. 22.

CHAPTER XII.

CONVERSION.

‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.’—MATT. xviii. 3.

BRIEFLY stated, conversion is a turning from sin unto God. Fallen man is estranged from God. He is in an abnormal state as regards his relationship to God, so that he needs a thorough spiritual revolution. The unconverted cannot walk in the way of God’s commandments, and cannot enjoy the service of God. By the working of the Holy Spirit, God changes his heart. This change of heart is called ‘regeneration,’* or the new birth. The change of life which results from the change of heart is called ‘conversion.’† These two are as inseparably connected with each other as fire and warmth. There can be no real turning from sin to holiness without the new birth, nor can the new birth take place without a corresponding change in the life.

Very frequently the term ‘conversion’‡ is used in a more general sense, describing the change of man from the power of the Evil One to the service of God. It then embraces and presupposes the new birth as well. The cause and effect are spoken of as one. It is in this more general sense the Bible frequently uses it, as in the following texts: ‘Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into

* Regeneration from the Latin *re*, again, and *genero*, to beget, to bring forth. Hence the new birth.

† Conversion from the Latin *con*, and *verto*, to turn.

‡ ‘By baptism we are set, as it were, in the path; but at our conversion we actually begin to walk in it with our faces Zionwards.’—BISHOP OXENDEN.

the kingdom of heaven.* ‘Repent ye, and be *converted*, that your sins may be blotted out.’† ‘Lest at any time they should be *converted*, and their sins should be forgiven them.’‡ ‘Their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be *converted*, and I should heal them.§ The law of the Lord is perfect, *converting* the soul.’|| Sinners shall be *converted* unto thee.’¶

The word ‘quicken,’ which, though not often used in general conversation, is frequently used in the Bible, has very much the same meaning as conversion. The Apostle says: ‘You hath he *quicken*d, who were dead in sins.’** It means ‘made alive.’ The state of those living ‘without God’ is that of spiritual death. They need regeneration, the new birth, which brings life. They are made alive, though once dead in sins.’ ‘This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’†† St. Paul says that ‘she that liveth in pleasure is *dead* while she liveth.’‡‡ Such an one needs the quickening influence of God’s Holy Spirit.

The desire to get to heaven is a very natural one. All have it more or less. But with most, if the desire were analyzed, it would be found to be simply a desire to escape hell, and not any love of holiness and the service of God. We must be ‘born again’ before we can truly love and enjoy God’s service. Many find a sweet Sabbath of rest on earth very wearisome, how much more so would they find the eternal Sabbath above! Many are very much wearied with the society of God’s children now. How much more so would they be if, as hereafter, they should have no other society! Of course, hereafter we shall all throw off that which pertains to the flesh and to human weakness, which makes Christians sometimes very unloveable. But that which is

* Matt. xviii. 3.

† Acts iii. 19.

‡ Mark iv. 12.

§ Matt. xiii. 15.

|| Ps. xix. 7.

¶ Ps. li. 13.

** Eph. ii. 1.

†† Luke xv. 24.

‡‡ 1 Tim. v. 6.

Christ-like will not be thrown off. It will be purified, and made more like Christ. Having made all the deductions we can for that which is of the human nature, and for that which is unloveable in the lives of Christians now, there are still many left who are living sweet, unselfish, Christ-like lives, but whose society is anything but appreciated by the world. Christ said to His disciples: 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.'* But as there must be perfect harmony in heaven, our Saviour tells us that without conversion, none can enter therein. Now as one of the ostensible objects of religion is to land us safe in heaven at last, it becomes us all seriously to consider what genuine conversion is. It is too important a matter to leave undecided. We may profess and call ourselves Christians, we may most rigidly adhere to all the maxims and morals inculcated by Christianity, but without conversion all our religion is in vain; for except we 'be converted,' we 'shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'

Conversion is a very real thing, though possibly many who have passed through it are unable to define it in so many words. A housemaid was once asked what she meant by saying that she was converted. She thought for a moment, and then said: 'Well, I do not know, but since I have been converted, I always sweep under the mats.' Before her conversion she would only take the trouble of removing what was visible to the mistress's eye. Since her conversion, she had learnt to do her duty, 'not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as the servant of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.'† A Christian lady once told another lady that she had heard that her cook was converted. 'I do not know anything about that,' said the lady, 'but the other day she brought me a large sum of money to which she said she had calculated her

* John xv. 19.

† Eph. vi. 6.

pilferings must have amounted during the time she had been in my service, and asked my forgiveness.' She only knew the practical results of her servant's conversion.

Conversion is not refining, polishing, educating, or cultivating the intellectual and moral qualities of a man. Some may be naturally kind, gentle, amiable, and good-natured. Others may, by cultivating these very desirable qualities, possess them as fully as if they had been born with them. But that is not conversion. Man may do much for himself, and much for his fellow-creatures, by way of elevating them, but he cannot change the heart. Some have assumed that a little good is left in the human heart like seed, which, if well cared for, will grow, and produce fruit. However much we should like this to be true, it is not the case. The Bible distinctly says, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.*' 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.†' 'For out of the heart of man proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornication, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.‡' An unseaworthy vessel may be painted over, and made to look like new, but that will not enable it to reach its destination. An unconverted man may cultivate moral qualities, and rise superior to grosser forms of sin, and appear all that is desirable, but that will not enable him to get to heaven at last.

Man needs a thorough change of heart. Hence that collect for Ash-Wednesday, 'Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercies, perfect remission and forgiveness.' The natural heart being sinful and corrupt, needs to be re-created. 'If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'§ 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within

* 1 Cor. ii. 14. † Jer. xvii. 9. ‡ Matt. xv. 19. § 2 Cor. v. 17.

you ; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* This new birth affects everything in connection with a man, whether it be his affections, his pleasures, his money, his books, or his companions. He loves those for whom he once had a supreme contempt ; he reads and enjoys books which once he thought very dry and uninteresting ; he finds a pleasure in God's service, which was once a weariness to him ; he finds money to spend in that service, which once was wasted on mere luxuries and appetite. His whole nature is changed, and yet he still remains the same man, and retains his individuality.

I have met some, who I feel sure are truly humble believers, who doubt their standing in Christ, because they think they have never been converted. On inquiry, one finds that they expect conversion to come to them suddenly, in a form like an electric shock or an extraordinary manifestation, such as a vivid dream or vision. They have heard and read of strange events in the conversion of others ; and because they have experienced nothing in their conversion that would even interest others, they at once doubt if they have ever been truly converted. Some certainly do pass through wonderful adventures at their conversion, but by far the majority of Christians experience changes more peaceful and unobserved. A conversion is none the less real because it has nothing sensational associated with it. Our peace of mind should not come from looking back upon a past conversion, but from realizing that now, at the present time, we are 'in Christ.' It is Christ's work, and not our conversion, that forms the groundwork of peace. If we are trusting to a past conversion, our very peace of mind is liable to be upset by insinuations as to whether that conversion at that time was real or not.

Some have been surprised to find that, after their conversion, old corruptions are alive. They thought that all these would

* Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

be slain, would be left behind, and would trouble them no more. They sometimes almost doubt if they have been truly converted. This arises from a want of clear views on the subject of the two natures described by St. Paul. As long as we are in the flesh, we shall retain some of the old sinful nature. But it shall not *reign* within us. Its presence shall be very really and painfully felt in the contest with sin. The sinful uprising of the fleshly nature of the old man seeking to reassert itself will have to be habitually repressed with a lifelong contest; but the Christian has the assurance that in the end he will prove 'more than conqueror through Him'* who loves Him. The existence of the sinful nature in the believer after conversion has been thus illustrated: 'A boat has been sailing on the salt ocean; it has come through many a storm, and, half full of the briny water, it is now sailing on the fresh water of the river. It is no longer in the salt water, but the salt water is in it. The Christian has got off the Adam-sea for ever. He is in the Christ-river for ever.† The Adam (or sinful) nature is still in him; but he is not in Adam, but in Christ.

There cannot be any true worship of God without conversion. 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.‡ Many may appear to worship Him who do not do so in reality. Christ says of many, 'This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their *heart* is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.§ God says, 'My son, give Me thine heart.¶ This is too often refused, because it would entail the loss of self-indulgence, the curbing of lust and passion, contests with besetting sin, and the sacrifice of the friendship of the world. Instead of giving

* Rom. viii. 37.

† W. P. Mackay, M.A.

‡ John iv. 24.

§ Matt. xv. 8.

¶ Prov. xxiii. 26.

their hearts, many substitute a grand worship, and think that God will accept it instead. That which was said to the Jews is applicable to them : 'Who hath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations . . . they are a trouble unto Me ; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you : yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. . . . Wash you, make you clean.'* One writer says : 'There may be a great deal of what looks like worship, which is, after all, the mere excitement and outgoing of natural feelings. There may be much apparent devotion, which is merely fleshly pietism. Nature may be acted upon in a religious way by a variety of things, such as pomp, ceremony, and parade, tones and attitudes, robes and vestments, an eloquent liturgy, all the varied attractions of a splendid ritualism, while there may be a total absence of spiritual worship. Indeed, it not unfrequently happens that the same tastes and tendencies which are called forth and gratified by the splendid attractions of the so-called religious worship, would find itself as well satisfied by the similar attractions of the operas, the oratorios, or concerts. They who worship God must do so in "spirit and in truth." The religion of the present day is decking herself with her most powerful charms. Having cast off the grossness of the Middle Ages, she is calling to herself all the resources of refined taste, and of a cultivated and enlightened age. Sculpture, music, and painting are pouring their rich treasure into her lap, in order that she may therewith prepare a powerful opiate to lull the thoughtless multitude into a slumber, which shall only be broken in upon by the unutterable horrors of death, judgment, and the lake of fire.'†

Conversion may be a sudden work, as in the case of St. Paul, and also of the Philippian gaoler; or it may be a more gradual working in the heart. One thing is certain, it must be a defi-

* Isa. i. 13.

† C. H. Mackintosh.

nite work. There are very few believers in Christ who cannot look back upon a time when they could not realize that their souls were saved. There are few who cannot say, 'One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.'* In some instances the Spirit works mightily and powerfully, convincing of sin and depravity at once, thus leading the poor sinner in all his helplessness to trust Christ. In other cases the Spirit works more gradually, and by degrees reveals to the sinner how sinful he is, and how utterly unable he is to save himself. As he gradually learns to distrust self, he also gradually learns to trust Christ.

As conversion is God's work from beginning to end, those who do not believe in 'sudden conversions,' and those who do not believe in 'gradual conversions,' must both alike be limiting God's power and ways of working. If God is able in the course of many years to change the heart, who would dare to say that He could not perform the same work in as many hours or minutes? On the other hand, those who have experienced very marked and sudden conversions, ought not to limit God's way of changing others' hearts to the way in which He changed their own. It is well in this matter carefully to distinguish between things that differ. Conversion is one thing, and the realization of peace with God is another. It is quite true that no intermediate stage is recognised in the Bible. A man must be either an heir of God or the child of the Evil One. There is no middle class. The moment he passes from one to the other, he is truly converted. But it is also true that some do not know when the change takes place. They only gradually learn to distrust self and to trust Christ. The following lines seem to express very beautifully the gradations in what is called gradual conversion :

'Oh ! the bitter shame and sorrow
That a time could ever be,

* John ix. 25.

When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answer,
" *All* of self, and *none* of Thee."

'Yet He found me, I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray, "Forgive them, Father;"
And my wistful heart said faintly,
" *Some* of self, and *some* of Thee."

'Day by day His tender mercy
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and ah! so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered,
" *Less* of self, and *more* of Thee."

'Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered;
Grant me now my spirit's longing—
" *None* of self, and *all* of Thee."

An experienced labourer* in the vineyard has recorded his opinion that 'a few may not be able to say when the change took place, but the great majority must know. The change from darkness to light is too great a change for the majority to permit to pass unnoticed. Trusting the experience of a comparative few who have undergone such an unconscious conversion, there are many who suppose that they are of the number, but who have never undergone any such change at all.' St. Paul would exhort one and all not to leave such an important matter undecided, but to make their 'calling and election *sure*.' Does not the slave know when he has been set free? And should we, who once were slaves to sin, not know when Christ set us free from the law of sin and death, and made us the servants of righteousness? Too much is at stake to leave the matter unsettled, for 'Except ye be converted . . . ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.'

* Rev. W. Gall.

CHAPTER XIII.

ASSURANCE.

‘These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God ; that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life.’—1 JOHN v. 13.

THERE are some well-meaning but misguided people in life who cannot associate rejoicing or happiness with religion. Excellent as some of these people are, it is astonishing what terrible stumbling-blocks they are to the spread of the very principles they profess to value. The worldling has his joys, and very real and tangible they appear at times. He will not give up those joys without a substitute. Nor does our Heavenly Father demand such an unnatural thing. He offers him, however, something better. Earthly joys cannot last, but our God offers us everlasting joys. Our Saviour, speaking to His disciples, says, ‘Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.’*

Gloomy† people are not attractive to the young at any time, still less are they so in religion. They deny the glorious doctrine of assurance, and believe that none can ever be certain about their soul’s salvation in this life, or perfectly happy at the thought of death. With the denial of assurance

* John xvii. 22.

† It is not enough to point out that some who are fully conscious of their individual reconciliation with God, and are rejoicing in the full assurance of salvation, are still gloomy. They may be so in spite of their glorious privilege, but it is not the assurance that makes them so. Exceptions there are to every rule. ‘Believing ye rejoice with joy unspeakable’ is the teaching of God’s Word, though some few, from natural temperament and other causes, have not a happy kind of religion.

the ground for rejoicing is cut away at once, for how can a man rejoice in religion when he knows not whether eternal happiness is for him? Now, if one characteristic of our Heavenly Father is more prominent than another, it is that of love. 'God is love. He loves us far more dearly than any earthly parent can love. If earthly parents, therefore, desire to see their children happy, how much more must our Heavenly Father desire it? What, moreover, can make a man happier in this life than to know that his soul is saved, and that all his sins are forgiven? The Bishop of Ripon thus puts it: 'Who may be expected to go forth to the battlefield with a stronger confidence or a nobler courage than the man who has learnt the true secret of being above the fear of death, through having been introduced by a living faith into God's adopted family—His children by adoption and grace? Did Hedley Vicars fight the less nobly or courageously because he had learnt the grand truth that there is "no condemnation to those that are in Christ Jesus"? or rather, was not the glorious realization in his mind of the truth that the "blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin," the secret which gave nerve to him in the hour of danger, and made him leave behind a glorious memory, cherished by all who value what is courageous in the British soldier, or what is faithful in the true-hearted Christian.'

Death may come to the humble believer who has this glorious assurance, and is met with no shrieks of agony and despair. Those who would rob us of the sweet comfort of a joyful consciousness of our soul's salvation, have nothing better to offer as a substitute than the unhappiness which arises from doubt and uncertainty. They say that none can *know* that they have eternal life till they lie down on their death-beds. Religion thus depicted offers no charm to the anxious, and drives many seeking ones back again into the frivolities of the world, bearing a false report of religion, which they say they

have tried, but from which they have derived no happiness in this life, nor certainty of happiness in the life to come.

Those who have not this joyful consciousness may be sure of one of two things—either that they are not living up to their privileges as God's children, and are thereby losing much 'joy and peace' which God intended them to have even in this sinful world; or else that their hearts have never yet been really changed, and that religion with them has hitherto been more a thing of intellect than of genuine conversion. God certainly intended us to have this assurance. The Apostle of Love says that it was with a view of enabling the early Christians to realize this truth that he wrote part of his Epistle. 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life;'* and again, 'We *know* that we have passed from death unto life.'† Then again, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.'‡ That is to say he *knows* it, his heart bears witness to the fact. The witness we find elsewhere is the witness of the Holy Spirit. 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we *are* the sons of God.'§ If we have not 'the witness' in our hearts, let us tremble lest after all we have only been deceiving ourselves. 'Let God be true, but every man a liar.'|| Many shrink from this close heart-searching, because they fear the result. Like the merchant who, though on the verge of bankruptcy, dreads to examine his accounts, he puts off the evil day as long as possible. But as mistakes can only be rectified on this side of the grave, let us obey the Apostle's command. 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith.'¶ Some day it will be too late, for 'as the tree falls, so will it lie.'

Those who take a morbid view of religion, frequently say it is presumption for any to say that they *know* their souls are

* 1 John v. 13.
§ Rom. viii. 16.

† 1 John iii. 14.
|| Rom. iii. 4.

‡ 1 John v. 10.
¶ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

saved. At first sight there certainly does seem to be some truth in the charge. Let us then look more closely into the subject. Who are qualified to be saved? Christ says, 'I am not come to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance ;'* and again, 'The Son of man is come to seek and save that which is *lost*.'† Surely it can hardly be presumption to take the *lost sinner's* place? Had the qualification been of an opposite kind, it might have been presumption for any to dare to say that they had fulfilled the conditions. The true believer may have the deepest sense of sin, and may be fully conscious of his own unworthiness, and yet at the same time may have the most glorious assurance that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven him all his sins. St. Paul said, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.'‡ The truly humble child of God cannot but feel the truth of these words. 'We do not *presume* to come . . . O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies.'§

If, with a view of commemorating some event, such as the presentation of colours to a regiment, her Majesty told the colonel to select six of the best men to receive some mark of favour, we might consider it great presumption for any individual to say that he knew he should be one. If, on the other hand, with a view of trying what kindness could do towards decreasing crime, she told the colonel to select six bad characters to form her bodyguard, it would hardly be considered presumption on the part of any individual for him to say that he knew he should be selected. The nature of the qualification makes all the difference. 'The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and *will preserve me* unto His heavenly kingdom,'|| says the Apostle ; if, therefore, we are

* Matt. ix. 13.

† Matt. xviii. 11.

‡ 2 Tim. i. 15.

§ Church of England Communion Service.

|| 2 Tim. iv. 18.

guilty of presumption, we are so in common with one who called himself the 'chief of sinners,' and yet said: 'I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him.'

The more deeply the inquirer feels his own unworthiness, the more he feels his need of a Saviour, and the sooner will he be reconciled to God. He will then find that true religion is not the gloomy thing so many would depict it. The Gospel is 'good news,' 'glad tidings of great joy' to the anxious sinner. Will the man who is expecting capital punishment, and who suddenly receives a reprieve, or a full pardon from the Queen, consider it a gloomy thing? Will he not rather rejoice that his life has been spared, even though only for a few uncertain years? How much more cause has the true child of God to have joy and peace, when he knows that though he had forfeited eternal life by sin, nevertheless he is made, through the merits of Jesus Christ, 'an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ.'*

It is not enough for us to know that heaven is a place of great happiness, if there is any doubt about our getting there. If the slightest doubt exists on the subject, religion will give us no happiness. What was it made the Ethiopian eunuch go 'on his way *rejoicing*?'† and why are we told that the Philippian jailor '*rejoiced*, believing in God'?‡ It was doubtless because both enjoyed a happy consciousness that their souls were saved.

'O happy day that fixed my choice
On Thee, my Saviour and my God!
Well may my glowing heart rejoice,
And tell its raptures all abroad.
Happy day! Happy day!
When Jesus washed my sins away.
He taught me how to watch and pray,
And live rejoicing every day.'

The Gospel is always pictured in the Bible as a thing to be rejoiced over. When the angels first announced the birth of

Rom. viii. 17.

† Acts viii. 39.

‡ Acts xvi. 34.

Christ, it was 'Fear not : for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born a Saviour.'* Christ said to His disciples, 'Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven';† and St. Paul said : 'Rejoice in the Lord alway and again I say, *Rejoice*.'‡ Now it is needless to say that a man cannot rejoice in religion unless he knows that his soul is saved. To some the Gospel is a 'savour of death unto death,'§ so that a man must first make sure that it is not so to him before he feels at liberty to rejoice in it. A man may become indifferent, may forget all about the future, may fill his mind with other things, and while doing so be happy for the time. But as long as he is intensely in earnest about his soul, and thinks on these things, he cannot have any peace of mind till the all-important question is settled, where is his soul to spend eternity?

As the Apostle Peter says, 'Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.'|| It may be well to see if any of the saints of old had this assurance. It is impossible to take every text in the Bible, so let the few following ones suffice. As far back as the time of Job we find, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold.'¶ There may be a difference of opinion as to the exact meaning of each word, but none can deny that the general hope of the believer is pretty clearly stated. In later days the Psalmist says, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me.'** 'As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness;'+†† and 'He preserveth the souls of His saints :

* Luke ii. 10. † Luke x. 20. ‡ Phil. iv. 4. § 2 Cor. ii. 16.
 || 1 Peter iii. 15. ¶ Job xix. 25. ** Psa. xxiii. 4. †† Psa. xvii. 15.

He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.* Towards the close of the Old Testament dispensation, the Prophet says, 'God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is *my* strength, and my song: He also is become *my* salvation.'† Then, foreseeing this dispensation, he says, 'And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.‡

In the New Testament, we find St. Paul saying, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day,'§ and again, 'Who hath saved us.'|| It is not that He *will* save us, or that He *may* save us, but that He 'hath' saved us. I think it must be admitted by all but those who have a special case to plead for, that whether the Christian's hope is universal or not in the Church of the present day, it certainly was looked upon as the privilege of every believer in the times over which the Scriptures extend. If such was the case, no one should now be satisfied without it. I was glad to see it stated recently at a public meeting in London, that the late Princess Alice, so dearly beloved by the people amongst whom she loved to work, expressed a desire to a lady that she might attend a meeting of poor people. This request led to a further conversation, in which the lady asked her *when* first she could realize that her soul was saved. The Princess replied, 'A poor Scotch Christian talked to me about the Gospel, and since then I have been able to say "I am saved!"'

Many people say they 'hope to be saved,' and with this hope they rest satisfied. Before going further, I may say from many years' experience, that I have never once met a person who professed to believe in the future at all who did not '*hope* to be saved.' There is something very vague and indefinite about this hope of salvation. In many cases it is grounded on a confused

* Psa. xcvi. 10.

† Isa. xii. 2.

‡ Isa. xxxii. 17.

§ 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

|| 2 Tim. i. 9.

idea of God's mercy hereafter, which none have a right to presume on, if they have not availed themselves of God's offer of mercy. A mere hope implies doubt, and is very different from assurance.

But it may be asked, does not the Bible speak of a hope? Yes, but then that hope is something very different. It is a 'sure and certain' hope. 'Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may *abound in hope*, through the power of the Holy Ghost.* This is not the vague hope of a man who hopes to pass a certain examination, although he has grave doubts as to whether he will or not. It is the joyful consciousness of one who *knows* that he is an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, in whose mind no doubt exists. 'And we do desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the *full assurance of hope* unto the end.†

There are some who hesitate to say that they are saved, and yet they do not think that they are lost, and so they go on through life. Religion must be a very unsatisfactory thing to such. They rob themselves of the happiness of true religion, and do not reap the pleasures, fleeting and unsatisfying as they may be, of the world. They have too much religion to enjoy the worldling's pleasures, and yet they have not the joy of the true child of God, who possesses the inner consciousness of reconciliation with his Heavenly Father. They fear to examine themselves lest the verdict should be against them. This state of uncertainty wrecks many. Far better would it be for them to examine themselves 'whether they be in the faith,'‡ now while yet there is time, than when too late to stand before the Great White Throne condemned.

It is most necessary that we should *know* that we have eternal life. Feelings are very variable. At one time we may feel happy, while at other times we may feel the contrary. Our

* Rom. xv. 13.

† Heb. vi. 11.

‡ 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

nerves, our physical constitution, the state of the atmosphere, all, more or less, affect our feelings. Our salvation is not dependent on these things, but on One who never changes, who, amid all the changing scenes of life, remains the same. If once we only know that He is pledged to save us, we may feel happy or not, but our salvation is secure. Feelings are treacherous, and there can be no deep, abiding 'joy and peace' without knowledge. The knowledge must come first, and the feelings will generally follow. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.*' We then feel happy because we know that we are saved.

Some reverse the order, and try to 'feel safe,' and thus they think they will know that they have eternal life. This is a great cause of much so-called backsliding. Some powerful speaker or some beautiful singing at a meeting excites the feelings. They feel happy, and they profess conversion. But after a time their feelings cool down, and they go back. Their hopes of heaven were founded on the sands of self, not on the rock which is Christ. While fully admitting the importance of striking when the iron is hot, and getting those who are interested at a meeting to decide then and there for Christ, it is most important to endeavour to distinguish between a mere emotional religion and the more solid hopes of the rejoicing young believer.

In a life like ours, in which we are continually exposed to dangers, in which none of us have a guarantee of living another hour, far less a month or a year, assurance is of the greatest importance. I once read of a couple of miners who had laid a train of gunpowder, with a view of blasting some rock down in a mine. They intended to give themselves plenty of time to be hauled up after they had lighted the slow match; but by some miscalculation they saw, to their horror, that a mistake had been made which was too late to rectify. The light was rapidly approaching the gunpowder, quite out of

* Rom. v. 1.

their reach. Their only hope lay in escape ; so both rushed to the cage and shouted to be hauled up. The attempt was made, but it was found that the weight was too great—only one could go up at a time. Who was to perish? There was a momentary pause, and one jumped out, saying: ‘You go aloft, and I will go to heaven.’ The explosion took place, and immediately afterwards a search was instituted. The brave fellow was found alive, though stunned and much hurt, beneath a lot of stones and *débris*. Fortunately an arch had been formed over him by one stone falling on two others, between which he was found. When he recovered, he was asked what had made him do this noble act? His reply was that he had lately been converted, and *knew* that his soul was safe, which he did not think was the case with the other man.

Nothing gives a believer so much confidence in speaking to others as to *know* that the question of his own safety is settled. ‘I believed, and *therefore* have I spoken ; we also believe, and *therefore* speak, *knowing* that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also.’* We can then ‘speak the things which we have seen and heard.’† A man may learn up much about theology by study, but unless he possesses an inner consciousness that his own soul is saved, he cannot plead with others with any degree of confidence. He may be well read in Church history and all ecclesiastical questions, but unless he has realized the power of the Gospel in his own soul, he cannot be a successful ‘winner of souls.’ The most illiterate man who has that inner consciousness possesses a power of which the other knows nothing. The one speaks from practical experience, the other only from theory.

One of the objections often urged against the doctrine of assurance is that some who profess to have it do not show by their lives that they are really God’s children, as they are living in sin. Now this may be a very good argument against the individuals concerned, but can hardly be fairly urged against the

* 2 Cor. iv. 13.

† Acts iv. 20.

doctrine itself. To say that none ever abuse, or have abused the doctrine of assurance would be to say what is not the case. There is not a doctrine in the Bible that has not been abused. The more truth there is in any doctrine, the more we may expect the Evil One to pervert it so as to prejudice others against it by presenting to their minds the perversion of the truth, rather than the truth itself. As I have endeavoured to show elsewhere, there is no denying the fact that some of God's true children do fall for a time into sin, and become backsliders. But it is very remarkable that when in that state, if they are truly God's children, He withdraws from them the 'witness of the Holy Spirit.' They have neither joyful assurance nor peaceful confidence. Peace of mind and wilful sin do not accompany each other, as the latter grieves the Spirit, and He departs.

I think it must be admitted that this is fully borne out in the history of David. He sinned, and consequently lost all 'joy and peace.' In one of the penitential Psalms written afterwards, he says, 'Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.' . . . 'Make me to hear joy and gladness.' . . . 'Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.*' The use of the word 'restore' clearly shows that in former days he had experienced 'joy,' and he asks that the joy which he once had should be restored. Further, it may be remarked that he does not pray, 'Restore unto me Thy salvation,' as if God had taken away the salvation that he once had. It is the '*joy* of Thy salvation' which he prays to have restored to him.

Those who wilfully live in sin, and still say that they know they are saved, have yet to find scriptural authority to support their position. The Bible speaks very plainly, and with no uncertain sound tells of the falls of God's children. But like David, they 'water their couch with tears' of sorrow; or, like Peter, they 'weep bitterly.' Let us beware that in putting

* Psa. li. 12.

forth our hand with holy jealousy to stay the ark of God's truth, by denying the doctrine of assurance because some have perverted its meaning, we do not thereby rob God's children of one of the most glorious truths in the Bible, and one that frequently has sustained martyrs at the stake. Far from this glorious assurance of hope having a bad effect on a man, the Apostle John says that the result should be the reverse. 'Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.'* 'And ye that love the Lord, hate evil'†

* 1 John iii. 3.

† Psa. xcvi. 10.

CHAPTER XIV.

FINAL PERSEVERANCE.*

‘They shall never perish.’—JOHN x. 28.

IN the last chapter I endeavoured to show that before we can have true ‘joy and peace,’ we must ‘know that we have passed from death unto life,’† and that this consciousness is quite consistent with the deepest humility and truest sense of sin. It is not, however, enough to know that we have passed from death unto life, if there is any possibility in the future of our passing back again. In other words, it is not sufficient for us to know that at present we are saved, if there is any chance of our being lost in the future. The true Christian knows his own weakness and inability to contend against all the besetting sins and temptations of life. He looks into the future, and trembles lest he should be overcome of the Evil One. How very ‘full

* Theologians have endeavoured to distinguish between final *perseverance* and final *preservation*, the former being man’s part, and the latter being God’s. I have avoided these fine theological distinctions as only calculated to perplex the minds of anxious seekers. Suffice it to say that from whichever aspect we view the matter, it is God’s work. In the one case it is the work of the Holy Spirit within making us *persevere* to the end. ‘He that endureth to the end shall be saved’ (Matt. x. 22). No man would so *persevere* were it not for the working of the Holy Spirit within him. In the other case, God is represented as a loving Father *preserving* His children from danger. Our hopes are hung on a two-fold cord. It is a great thing to know that we are clinging to Christ, but it is a happier thing to know that Christ is holding us up.

† John iii. 14.

of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ,* must then be the testimony of Christ that those to whom He has once given eternal life 'shall never perish.'

It cannot be denied, however, that a very large class of people make a profession of religion, and for a time seem to run well, and then go back to the world, and eventually perish in their sins. One is often asked to account for this since our Saviour says that His people 'shall never perish.' The only solution of the apparent difficulty is that such could never have been truly converted, and consequently never have become possessors of eternal life. It is quite possible not only to deceive others, but even to deceive ourselves. It is quite possible to have only an intellectual knowledge of saving truths without ever having had the heart changed. Such are not backsliders, though often so called, because in reality they have nothing from which to backslide. Theirs was but an empty profession from beginning to end. They resemble the flying fish one sees in the Red Sea, which, after leaving the water, fly along for a time like birds, but just when they might be expected to rise in the air, dart back again into their own natural element. They are not birds, though it must be admitted that for a time they appear such. Many worldlings, for some reason or other, make a profession of religion, and sometimes seem to be even more in earnest than real Christians. The profession is maintained for a time, only to return to the chilly atmosphere of the world. Some of this class are hypocrites, who only hoped to gain some worldly advantage by making a profession of godliness. Having gained their object, or having failed, they once more seek the attractions of the world. The example of such as these is often cited as an excuse for neglecting religion. Let us rather avoid their fate and turn to Christ, taking warning by them. Students in medical

* Art. XVII. Church of England Prayer Book.

science do not abandon the study because quacks and impostors have professed to teach the healing art. The desire to be able to expose imposition has rather added zest to their study. Wherever there is anything real, there is generally a counterfeit. The more valuable the reality, the greater the temptation to counterfeit; farthings are not so frequently counterfeited as coins of higher value.

But all are not hypocritical deceivers of others. Many are very sincere deceivers of themselves. Their feelings are worked upon, and perhaps their views are changed, though not their hearts. In the parable of the sower, our Saviour describes them as those who 'receive it with gladness, and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time; afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the Word's sake, immediately they are offended.*' Their religion was only emotional, and was lacking in reality. St. John says of them, 'They went out from us, but they *were not of us*; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.†' Our Saviour prepares us to expect some of this class when He says, 'Every plant which My Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.‡' The promise is only 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life.§' The true believer, in whom God has sown the seeds of eternal life, will have grace given him to overcome:

'The grace that called him to the Cross,
That grace shall keep him there.'

Christ not only tells us that His people 'shall never perish,' but He gives us the reason in the next verse: 'My Father, which gave them to Me, *is greater than all*; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.' The safety of the true child of God is not dependent on his fidelity, but on the power of God, who is 'greater than all' the adverse powers

* Mark iv. 16. † 1 John ii. 19. ‡ Matt. xv. 13. § Rev. ii. 7.

who may raise opposition. The best of men can be easily overcome, but God cannot be overcome. St. Peter addresses his epistle to the elect, who, he tells us, are '*kept* by the power of God through faith unto salvation.'* He that is for us is surely greater than all that are against us. If left to ourselves for one single day, we should fall, but we are '*preserved* in Jesus Christ.'† The question then arises, Is Christ able to keep us from falling? This St. Jude answers in the affirmative when he ascribes all the praise 'unto Him who is *able* to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.'‡ St. Paul also says, 'I know whom I have believed (*margin*, trusted), and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him.'§ Without this assurance, the humble child of God can never truly have 'joy and peace.'

St. Paul says, 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.'|| But some timid one at once says, 'Yes, as long as I am in Christ I know that there is no condemnation, but I may be separated from Him.' The Apostle goes on to meet this very argument at the close of the chapter, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.'¶ 'But,' urges the inquirer, 'it is not any of these that I fear. It is my own weakness and sinfulness of which I am afraid.' Now, who tempts any to sin? It is the Evil One. There is not a sinful thought, word, or deed of which he is not

* 1 Peter i. 5.
§ 2 Tim. i. 12.

† Jude 1.
|| Rom. viii. 1.

‡ Jude 24.
¶ Rom. viii. 37, 39.

the author. The question is, Can he then by these temptations separate us from Christ? The Apostle says, 'No,' in the words 'nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers.' It is needless to point out that these are evil angels, as it would have been quite superfluous to tell us that the good angels would not separate us from God. But we are not even left to this reasonable conjecture, for elsewhere we find the 'principalities and powers' are connected with 'rulers of the darkness of this world,' and 'spiritual wickedness'* (*margin*, 'wicked spirits'), showing who were meant. Not even the Evil One himself, and still less his emissaries, have power to separate us from Christ, who puts a limit to the power of the Evil One, and 'will not suffer' us 'to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape.'†

It is an encouraging thought that Christ is not only the Author, but He is also the *Finisher* of our faith. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending.

This doctrine of final perseverance is very encouraging to one seeking to lead a godly life. From want of the knowledge of this truth, many are kept back. An officer once said to me, 'I should like to be religious, but it is not in me. I might go on for a time, but I could not *last*.' How many more have had this feeling, but have never expressed it in so many words! How encouraging to such to have it shown them from God's Word that though they may not of themselves last, He who is too faithful to break His word has pledged Himself to keep that which they have committed unto Him! Without this holy confidence, how can any look into the future except in a state of awful suspense at the thought of whether they will continue to the end or not? The pilgrimage is a very long one sometimes; the rocks ahead are very dangerous; the storms, trials, temptations, and persecution may be very severe. There are 'fightings within and fears without,' but in spite of all, we can

* Eph. vi. 12.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

have true 'joy and peace,' because Christ, the Captain of our salvation, is on board our frail bark, and will steer us through all dangers safe into the haven, and receive the soul at last. 'Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*'

I have heard it said that the doctrine of final perseverance is very liable to make Christians careless. Of course any truth may be abused, and undoubtedly many who are 'unlearned,' or untaught by the Holy Spirit, have wrested this doctrine, 'as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.'† But no one who is a true child of God would thus abuse a doctrine given us for our encouragement. I believe the reverse of this doctrine makes some very *reckless*. I once asked a young officer, who had been truly brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, what it was that had made him so reckless before for many years. His reply was, 'Well, I thought I might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb. I had tried over and over again to be religious, but had failed, so I thought if I was to be lost hereafter, I would certainly have my fling of this world's pleasures.' When the doctrine of a joyful consciousness of a present salvation, and the certainty of being 'kept by the power of God,' were presented to him, he gladly accepted them, and ceased his reckless life.

A story is told of a young man who heard a minister say in his sermon, 'Once a child, always a child,' and who took occasion from that to plunge into, and continue in, open sin. The best explanation of his case seems to me to be in the following extract: 'It is only one of thousands. We believe the minister was right in what he said, but the young man was wrong in what he did. To judge the words of the former by the acts of the latter is utterly false. What should I think of my son if he were to say, "Once a son, always a son, and,

* Phil. i. 6.

† 2 Peter iii. 16.

therefore, I may proceed to smash my father's windows and do all sorts of mischief"? We judge the minister's statement by the Word of God, and pronounce it true. We judge the young man's conduct by the same rule, and pronounce it false. The matter is quite simple. We have no reason to believe that the unhappy young man ever really tasted the true grace of God, for if he had, *he would love and cultivate and exhibit holiness*. The Christian has to struggle with sin; but *struggling* with it and *wallowing* in it are two totally different ideas. In the one case we can count on Christ's sympathy and grace; in the other, we are actually blaspheming His Name by implying that He is the minister of sin.*

In conclusion, it may be asked if there are any texts in the Bible which seem to imply that a true believer can fall away? There certainly are a few which at first sight would leave that impression. As no one part of Scripture contradicts another part, both doctrines cannot be taught therein, so that it becomes us to search the Scriptures carefully on the subject. It would be impossible in a chapter like this to mention all the texts on either side. But as I have already mentioned a few showing that a believer cannot fall away, I will take the two passages most frequently quoted on the other side. One is, 'Even denying the Lord that *bought* them.'† And here again I will quote from the same writer: 'The Lord has a double claim on every man, woman, and child beneath the canopy of heaven. He has a claim founded on creation, and a claim founded on redemption. It is to the latter of these two that the Apostle refers. The false teachers will not merely deny the Lord that *made* them, but even the Lord that *bought* them. . . . The Lord Jesus has a purchased right over every member of the human family. The Father has given Him power over all flesh. Hence the sin of those who deny Him. It would be sin to deny Him as a Creator; it is a greater sin to deny Him as a

* C. H. Mackintosh.

† 2 Peter ii. 1.

Redeemer. It is not at all a question of regeneration. The Apostle does not say, "Denying the Lord that quickened them." This would indeed be a difficulty; but as the passage stands, it leaves wholly untouched the truth of final perseverance.' The other passage is, 'Lest by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.' The Bishop of Liverpool says, 'I see nothing in this but the godly fear of falling into sin, which is one of the marks of a believer, and distinguishes him from the unconverted, and a simple declaration of the means which St. Paul used to preserve himself from being a castaway. It is like "He that is begotten of God *keepeth himself*."' Another writer says: 'This does not imply that the Apostle doubted his acceptance or perseverance, but it showed the Corinthians the nature of his assurance, and cautioned them not to rest in such hopes as were consistent with self-indulgence.' The Apostle had 'no confidence in the flesh,' yet he was 'always confident,'* 'knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.' And here we learn a valuable lesson from looking at nature. When God gives life, He also implants a strong instinct of self-preservation. Every available means are made use of for this purpose. And so when He gives eternal life, He also gives grace to enable us to make our

* 'This two-sidedness is a remarkable characteristic of Scripture, as compared with the general tone and aim of human writings, especially theological ones. Theologians generally write to forward some one truth, which they maintain simply, and argue for exclusively. They construct a scheme and system upon that one, and then reject all other and counter-truth as interfering with their system. Their aim is to be compact and systematic, and they are afraid of any disturbance and any appearance of inconsistency. But Scripture is the opposite of all this. Scripture is not afraid of being inconsistent, and contradicting itself—I mean apparently, and as far as language goes. Truth, as apprehended by our present faculties, contains opposite and irreconcilable elements, and consists of tendencies of thought which can never be brought to a common goal. Scripture, then, simply puts forward truth as we at present, and with our limited faculties, can embrace it.'—J. B. MOZLEY, B.D.

calling and election sure. Without the latter, there certainly is no proof of the former.

It cannot, however, be denied that the warnings of the Bible are very solemn and awful, and show us that men may go very far in religion without the grace of God, and eventually may become reprobates. The promises are given us for the comfort and encouragement of the true child of God, and the threatening warnings are given to keep us from presuming on the grace of God. There is something very mean and unmanly about some who call themselves Christians, who like to take all they can get out of religion without giving any return. They like to make use of the promises and utterly to ignore the warnings. The Apostle says that it is 'through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth' that 'God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.' He that elected us to salvation also elected us unto sanctification and holiness. If we have not proofs of His election to the latter, we certainly have no right to imagine that we are elected to the former. Those who do not make their 'calling and election sure' by a life of holiness have no right to presume* that they are of the Lord's elect, and are therefore yet in their sins.

* 'As men differ with respect to the first beginning of a work of grace, so do they also with respect to the manner in which it must be carried on; some affirming that God has engaged to "perfect that which concerneth us;" and others, that even St. Paul has reason to fear "lest he himself should become a castaway." But why should these things be deemed incompatible? Does not every man feel within himself a liableness, yea, a proneness, to fall? Does not every man feel that there is corruption enough within him to drive him to the commission of the greatest enormities, and eternally to destroy his soul? He can have but little knowledge of his own heart who will deny this. On the other hand, who that is holding on in the ways of righteousness does not daily ascribe his steadfastness to the influence of that grace which he receives from God; and look daily to God for more grace, in order that he may be "kept by His power through faith unto salvation"? . . . God carries on and completes His work in our souls, by causing us to feel our proneness to apostatize, and by making us cry to Him daily for the more effectual influences of His grace.'—
REV. CHAS. SIMEON.

CHAPTER XV.

BACKSLIDING.

‘Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backsliding.’—Jer. iii. 22.

BACKSLIDERS may be divided into two classes; (1) those who have backslidden in heart only; (2) those who have backslidden in life as well as in heart. All backsliding in spiritual life commences in the heart. It is not necessary to become an open sinner or worldling to be a backslider. Many keep up an apparently consistent walk, and yet are backsliders in God’s sight. Their neighbours see little or no change in them. They have ‘a name to live,’ and they retain the name, but they have left their ‘first love.’* They may preach most eloquently, and pray most beautifully; they may for a long time, from force of habit, run on in the old grooves, but spiritually they are ‘dead.’ They perhaps continue to read God’s Word, but they do not enjoy it. They pray extempore or otherwise, but they lack liberty. They are not happy spiritually. Their Saviour becomes a ‘stranger in the land and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night.’† Once He was not a mere Visitor, but an abiding Guest. If we find ourselves not enjoying and relishing our daily food, we immediately suspect that something is wrong. In the same way when spiritual food and means of grace are not enjoyed,

* Rev. ii. 4.

† Jer. xiv. 8.

let us beware and seek the Great Physician of souls, who alone can cure us.

If the means of cure are neglected, those who have hitherto only backslidden in heart may possibly soon become backsliders in life as well. Often one hears of a terrible fall to some man eminent as an earnest and real Christian. Many wonder that one so earnest and decided should thus fall. But who knows how long a process of undermining had been going on within the heart? 'Ice does not become strong enough to bear a man all at once. First of all a film forms on the surface almost imperceptible to the eye; this gradually thickens, and hardens till it can bear any weight. If the Christian acts against his conscience, gradually it hardens till it can commit sins unblushingly, which once he would have blushed to have even thought of.* We should ever bear in mind what a terribly accumulative power sin possesses. Sin once indulged acquires an ever-increasing power, a fact not generally known, and certainly not sufficiently recognized. Many think they can just indulge for once in their pet sin, 'the sin which doth so easily beset them,'† and then have done with it for ever. 'Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.‡ Sin cannot be indulged with impunity. You may cut down the noxious weed, but it will spring up again with renewed force. We should avoid giving any reins to sin. The runaway horse is permitted to canter only; that canter becomes a gallop; that gallop becomes uncontrollable. The rider is hurled along against his will to destruction. We must watch and pray against the first inlet of sin, knowing that it possesses an ever-increasing force. A little leak neglected has sent many a noble ship to the bottom.

Backsliders who have suffered from spiritual declension for any length of time generally give up the means of grace by

* Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.

† Heb. xii. 1.

‡ Gal. vi. 7.

degrees, but seldom do it suddenly. Excuses and reasons are formed for the neglect which were never permitted to influence them before. One by one most of the old haunts are forsaken with the most plausible reasons for so doing, but the backslider never admits that any change has taken place within himself. It is the preacher who has changed, or the singing that has become bad, or the prayers that have become too long, or the bad way they are read (if from the liturgy), or the Christian friends who have changed so. One almost wonders that they do not say that the Bible itself has changed. It is like the case of a poor consumptive patient who will not admit the nature of the disease. The cough is attributed first of all to one cause, and then to another. Any reason but the true one is given, till the awful truth can be concealed no longer. The true secret of the apparent change in everything to the backslider is, that his own heart is changing, having lost its first love.

The backslider is generally unhappy. At conversion his nature was so changed that he cannot thoroughly enjoy the pleasures of the world again, and yet he lacks the joy and peace of the true believer, who enjoys the presence of Him who is 'the chiefest among ten thousand,' . . . the 'altogether lovely.' Doubtless this is God's way of restoring the soul, and leading it back into the paths of righteousness. Sin is tempting ; it allures us away from our allegiance to God. But soon it is found to be unsatisfying, and what was once much desired turns out to be only husks, and instead of 'joy and peace,' the backslider reaps sorrow, disappointment, and pain. This is beautifully expressed by Cowper :

'What peaceful hours I once enjoyed !
 How sweet their memory still !
 But they have left an aching void
 The world can never fill.
 Return, O holy Dove, return !
 Sweet messenger of rest !
 I hate the sins that made Thee mourn,
 And drove Thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.'

If the backslider still continues to neglect God's service, he will doubtless have to pass through much sorrow and affliction. Many backsliders, though most unhappy, have too much pride to return and confess their faults. So God as a loving Father has to send trial upon trial, till their proud hearts are broken with sorrow, and at last submit. Of those who have never been truly 'born again,' God says now as He said of old, 'He is joined to idols : let him alone.'* But not so with His true children ; they are too precious, and He loves them too much to let them perish, and so, painful though the way may be, He brings them back again. I well remember the case of a Christian soldier who became a backslider. In his backsliding state he married a woman, who proved the greatest hindrance to his return. In the course of a few years three children were born, and he was apparently very happy. The world shone on him and he prospered, and was eventually promoted to the rank of a sergeant. Then God commenced the painful discipline. One by one the children were snatched away by death. That was not enough. He was tried by court-martial for drunkenness on duty, and was reduced. About the time that the sentence was read out, his wife died. I asked him once, when I had an opportunity of quietly speaking to him, if he could see God's hand in this? The poor fellow replied, 'Yes, I might have kept them all had I not neglected God's service.' From that time till he left the service he made a fresh stand as a Christian.

To those who have got sick and weary at heart of the ways of the world God says, 'Return unto Me, and I will return unto you.'† What a gracious Saviour ! Had we treated any earthly Prince so disloyally, he would long ago have cast us off for ever,

* Hosea iv. 17.

† Mal. iii. 7.

and left us to suffer the penalties of our own faults. But not so with the Prince of Peace. He is longing and waiting to be gracious. 'Prove Me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*' I have heard a story told of a poor girl who left her mother and for a time wandered in the paths of sin. She came to despise herself, and longed to return, but feared that her mother would not receive her back. She was too proud to write and ask. One day a Christian lady accosted her, and heard the whole sad story. The lady said she would write and ask the mother if she would receive her daughter back again at once, or let her wait for a time in some Home. The answer came back by telegram, 'Immediately.' The poor mother was only too delighted to hear where her daughter was, and that she was willing to return. If earthly parents so desire the speedy return of their erring ones, need we be surprised if our loving Heavenly Father still more desires to welcome wanderers home? He says, 'Return unto Me, and I will return unto you.'

'What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man . . . which shall know every man *the plague of his own heart*, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear thou in heaven, Thy dwelling-place, and forgive.†' Backsliders who have learnt the plague of their own hearts may be assured, that however deeply they may have fallen, they have a God of mercy to deal with, who can forgive. But when they have returned they should be most careful to avoid the cause of their former fall, whether it arose from neglect of the means of grace, love of money, honour or glory, fleshly sins, or love of the world. The hottest iron steeped in cold water becomes cold and hard, and the warmest-hearted Christian will become cold and dead if steeped in the cold atmosphere of sin

* Mal. iii. 10.

† 1 Kings viii. 38.

and the world. To retain spiritual life and warmth we need to bask in the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. The world should be to us what the water is to the diver seeking pearls. It is a foreign element, and he remains in it no longer than necessary. He never breathes freely till he is out of it. The Christian, though not of the world, has to be in the world, to fill the social, domestic and professional duties of life. Therein he is bound to seek for precious souls for his Master, but when there, he should recognise the dangers of the world, and pray to be kept from its evil, and from being actuated by the motives of the world. As long as the heart is loyal to God, the world will have no power. When people make excuse about their business and their duty being the cause of their backsliding, it is only an attempt to evade the blame by accrediting it to God, who placed them in that sphere. When God places us in a certain position He gives us grace so that we shall sustain no injury. He who provides scales for fish, so that the action of the water should not injure them, will find means and ways to keep His people from being 'tempted above that they are able;' and 'with the temptation also make a way to escape.'

Frequently people pray, 'Lead us not into temptation;' and then, like an ox led to the slaughter, they deliberately walk into temptation. Either for business, pleasure, money, honour, or glory, they go where the restraining power of God does not accompany them. They lose their spiritual strength, and become like Samson, 'who wist not that the Lord was departed from him.*' They go forth as often as they have done before to meet some temptation which hitherto they have had strength to overcome. They succumb to the temptation, and thus make sport for the enemies of God, who rejoice to see them fall. What cause we have to pray, 'Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies'

* Judges xvi. 20.

(margin, 'those which observe me.'^o) Though Christians, we have no strength in ourselves to withstand temptation. We may make the strongest resolution and have the best intention on going forth, and yet be 'overtaken in a fault.' We have a power in Christ, but if we do not avail ourselves of that power by continually watching and praying, and making use of the means of grace, that power will be of no avail. A man who can swim has no more buoyancy than one who cannot, he only keeps himself afloat by making use of the means. Let him have his legs and arms lashed together, and it will be found that he will sink as deeply as one who cannot swim. And unless the Christian man avails himself of the means placed at his disposal to sustain his spiritual life, he will sink as deeply in the filth and mire of sin as any unconverted man.

A story is told of a gentleman who had a beautiful singing canary. A friend wanted to try if he could teach his sparrows to sing by keeping the canary with them. He borrowed the canary and placed it in the cage with his sparrows. Instead, however, of teaching them to sing, the poor bird got so timid among the strange birds that it stopped singing altogether, and did nothing but chirp like the sparrows. The owner then took it back; but still it would not sing. It then occurred to him to put it beside another canary, which sang well. This had the desired effect, and regaining the old note, it sang as beautifully as ever. Many Christians go, like the canary, into the strange company and atmosphere of the worldlings, and consequently they not only do not teach the world to sing their happy glorious note of praise, but they cannot sing the old songs of praise in a strange land themselves, and soon they learn the sorrowful note of the world. The best thing for such is to go back again into the more genial society of happy rejoicing Christians, among whom they will soon learn to sing the glorious notes of praise again, making melody in their hearts.

* *Psa. xxvii. 11.*

How many a young Christian starts with that indescribable something so hard to explain and define, but yet so really felt, 'the joy of the Lord,' and in course of time loses it. Whatever else he may have gained, without that, he has lost all that makes the Christian life enjoyable. It is like a sensitive plant that shrinks up at the touch of sin indulged, worldly pleasures, sensual thoughts, vanities and frivolities. Whatsoever passing pleasures these may have given, they cannot compensate for the loss of the joy of the Lord. Only those who have truly enjoyed this precious jewel of the Christian life know how easily they can be robbed of it. Let those of us who have lost it seek for it, as they would for treasures of gold; and 'let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,' and pray for resolution not to resist once or twice, but habitually to repress the temptation to indulge in that which will rob us of our treasure.

Insane people have been known to play with pebbles, and think them valuable diamonds. Though we may laugh at them, we Christians too have seasons of temporary insanity, when things lose their relative value in our eyes, and things temporal seem to have value equal to things which are eternal. Many sow thorns during the spring-time of life, to be reaped in the autumn of old age, perhaps on a dying bed. We are all too prone to forget the reward hereafter—the crown of glory that fadeth not away—and to pant for and grasp after the poor perishing things of life. Well may we accept our Saviour's warning when He said, 'What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.'*

* Mark xiii. 37.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

‘Without were fightings, within were fears.’—2 COR. vii. 5.

IN the first dawn of Christianity, to confess to being a disciple of Christ, and to follow in His footsteps, was to court persecution, if not martyrdom, of one kind or another. And yet this open and bitter opposition of the Evil One did not stay the spread of divine truth. The blood of the martyrs became but the seed of the Church. Whole nationalities became entirely Christian, and now, far from shrinking, through fear of martyrdom, from becoming a Christian, the exception is to meet a man who does not in some way associate himself with the sacred name of Christianity. But we must not be deceived by this change of tactics on the part of the Evil One, who adapts his plans according to circumstances. It is one thing to profess to be a Christian, and quite another thing to be one in heart.

The outward seal of baptism is not enough, any more than the old seal of circumcision was sufficient to change the heart. ‘For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly: and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.’* ‘For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.’† This is a truth which in theory every Sunday is recognised when true believers pray ‘that all who pro-

* Rom. ii. 28.

† Rom. ix. 6.

fess and call themselves Christians, may be led into the way of truth.' It is evident, therefore, that it is quite possible to profess and call ourselves Christians, without being in the way of truth. Whilst most fully admitting the importance of liberality, and avoiding a hasty or harsh judgment in discerning who are and who are not real Christians, we must never forget on the other hand our Saviour's words: 'Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.'* However liberal-minded a Christian man seeks to be, there will always be a limit beyond which he cannot go if he is loyal to the Bible.

As long as the young believer only professes and calls himself a Christian, he need fear nothing. But once let him show that he desires to be something more than a nominal Christian, a mere professor, and he will find that the 'offence of the cross' has not ceased. Though this age of civilization has abolished the contest with wild beasts in the amphitheatre, and the burning stake, yet the ill-concealed sneer or the open taunt will be quite sufficient to show him that he who would wear the crown hereafter, must bear the cross below. Once let the world detect the change in their old associates, and they evince *surprise*. This surprise is succeeded by a feeling of *derision* and scorn—this exhibition of feeling will show itself in different ways, according to circumstances. In refined society, it is generally shown by a disdainful though silent toleration, a thing more hard to bear by people of a sensitive disposition than open opposition. In coarser society, and among schoolboys where feelings are not so confined by social restraints, opponents give vent to their feelings in ridicule. Unkind and opprobrious epithets are freely applied, till one almost wonders if those who apply these epithets are aware that

* Matt. vii. 13.

the objects of their contempt are only carrying on the work inaugurated by saints and martyrs of old, and that the lives of many of our greatest reformers were sacrificed in defence of the very truth which these disregard.

Some young Christians, however, think to avoid opposition by not acting with decision at first. By a certain amount of worldly conformity, they endeavour to avoid being noticed. They excuse themselves on the plea that by degrees they will grow stronger, and better able to stand opposition than they are at the commencement of their changed life. Further, they reason that if they come out very decidedly at first, and afterwards fall away, they will bring a great reproach on the name of Christ. This is a favourite suggestion of Satan's, and, indeed, in both these excuses there is much plausibility; but we must not forget that at times the Evil One can disguise himself as an angel of light, and profess great zeal for the cause of divine truth, if it suits his purpose. While most fully recognising the advisability of not making any ostentatious parade of a new-born faith, it is nevertheless impossible to think that this hiding of one's colours is anything but a delusion and a snare. Not only is it tampering with a young and tender conscience, and a policy the very reverse of what we understand by manly, honest, and straightforward; but that very compromise which at first is only used as a screen becomes a sort of second nature, and the consequence is that such Christians, as a rule, become temporizing, worldly, and time-serving.

Our Heavenly Father does not lead us by crooked paths. He knows our frailties and our weakness, and He alone can temper the wind to the shorn lamb. He can 'restrain the wrath of man just when He sees fit, and will not permit one more wave of persecution, or of affliction, than is necessary to roll over the head of the believer. A certain amount of persecution is undoubtedly a good thing for the individual, as for

the Church at large, which has always flourished in spirituality when suffering most opposition.

‘It is by blows that iron grows
Of greater strength possessed.’

It has been compared to the acid with which the goldsmith tests the quality of his precious metal. In the words of Lord Macaulay, ‘The most rigid discipline that can be enforced within a religious society is a very feeble instrument of purification, when compared with a little sharp persecution from without. We may be certain that very few persons, not seriously impressed by religious convictions, applied for baptism while Diocletian was vexing the Church, or joined themselves to Protestant congregations at the risk of being burned by Bonner. But when a sect becomes powerful, when its favour is the road to riches and dignities, worldly and ambitious men crowd into it, talk its language, conform strictly to its ritual, mimic its peculiarities, and frequently go beyond its honest members in all the outward indications of zeal. No discernment, no watchfulness on the part of ecclesiastical rulers can prevent the intrusion of such false brethren.’ . . . ‘Thus it was with the English Puritans. Oppression kept them pure, but when their favour became a channel of advancement in the State, the sincere Puritans soon found themselves lost in a multitude of base imitators, who, with the language of Scripture on their lips, lived in the practice of fraud and secret licentiousness.’

The young believer had better, if only for his own sake, come out decidedly at first, without giving any unnecessary offence, though not shrinking from the offence of the cross, and, in the full flood-tide of his ‘first love,’ overcome difficulties and opposition. ‘Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.’* ‘Be not

* 2 Cor. vi. 17.

afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.*

Not only does the Evil One assault us from *without*, but he does so from *within* as well. Many a young Christian thinks, after his conversion, that all is ended, the conflict over. He has great 'joy and peace' in believing, and this, he thinks, will continue with him unto the end. In one sense he is right. He has enlisted under the Captain of his salvation, who is pledged to present him 'faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.'† But, on the other hand, he must remember the conflict before him. He has enlisted in Christ's army, 'manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil.'‡ Christ has now become the 'Captain of his salvation,' and will make him 'more than conqueror;' but none the less will the conflict be a very real one, as all experienced Christians have found out. The Evil One does not cease to assault the soul. On the contrary, he sees that he has lost a victim, who may become an active agent to contend against his power, and may possibly be the means of leading souls to Christ. He therefore puts forth all his powers of temptation, with the view of extinguishing the testimony of such a one; hence 'within are fears.'

The young believer need not despair because he finds that his old corrupt nature asserts itself very strongly. The conflict going on between right and wrong is, after all, but a sign of life.§

§ 'Our minds may be rendered uncomfortable by temptations, or, as the Apostle Peter phrases it, we may be "in heaviness through manifold temptations." . . . There have been moderate Christians, there have been shallow Christians, without very much temptation; but there never yet was a saintly Christian, never yet one who pressed to the higher summits of the spiritual life, never one whose banner bore the strange device "Excelsior," who was not made the victim of manifold temptations. My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.'—DEAN GOULBURN.

* Luke xii. 4.

† Jude 24.

‡ Baptismal Service.

When sin reigned supreme, there was no conflict ; but now the contest is so real, that he has 'fears within' as to whether or not his conversion was real. It has been truly said that dead men deal no blows. Therefore, the very fact that any conflict exists is proof that life is there. Some mourn over coldness of heart as if it were a sign of death. Now, without wishing to encourage any in continued coldness of heart, it is only fair to state, for the encouragement of those who are almost inclined to give way to despair, that this very sense of coldness is a proof of life. Dead men do not feel the cold. It has been truly pointed out that 'peace with God' does not mean peace with sin, or peace with the corrupt flesh, or peace with the devil, or peace with the world. With all these there should be a continual conflict, but none the less will there be peace with God.

The world has its heroes—men who have nobly won victories, men who have denied themselves for the sake of their country, men who have set before them one object, and have made that their one aim through life. These heroes are loudly applauded and much thought of. But there is a heroism of which the outside world knows nothing, which one Eye alone can see, which, though it will not have applauding breath wasted on it here below, will none the less hear the welcome words hereafter : 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* I refer to the contest and struggle with besetting sin, which goes on daily in the battle-field of the heart. Sin sometimes comes in most tempting forms, and sometimes takes us unawares. Let us ever be on our guard. However long and painful the conflict may be, let us ever bear in mind that One is looking on who was 'in all points tempted like as we are,† and who can sympathize with us in all our struggles :

'Only a little "moment" to breast the surging sea,
And temptation, with its darkness, shall cease to shadow thee ;
Only a little moment struggling with self and sin,
And then the endless victory, eternal rest within.'

* Matt. xxv. 21.

† Heb. iv. 15.

If Christ is our King, we must be loyal subjects, and permit Him to reign in our hearts, 'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*' Perhaps there is nothing in the Christian life which calls for such a terrible exercise of the will as in this matter of 'sinful thoughts.' Many who successfully curb their inclinations to outward forms of sin, fail in this respect. Faith alone can enable us to overcome. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.† That is to say, an intense realization of God's presence ever with and around us is the only true secret of a successful contest. Man possesses a power of self-control of which he frequently does not avail himself. For instance, many a swearer, excuses himself on the score of temper; he says he cannot control himself. The true secret is that he does not will to do so, and therefore makes no effort. Follow such a one into the presence of his superiors, or into ladies' society, and you will find, if he be fit for society at all, that their presence is sufficient to deter him. But God's presence is ever around us. 'In Him we live, and move, and have our being.‡ The reason that the Divine presence does not control the swearer so much as the presence of some poor fellow-sinner, is that he has no faith. To him God is an abstract Being of whom he knows nothing, and whose presence he does not realize. Not so with the man of strong faith. He ever grasps the fact of the Divine presence, and hence seeks to please Him, and to lead a holy life, even though unseen by mortal eye. However great the temptation may be, he says, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'§ Faith enables him to overcome because 'he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible,'|| and to look to Him for strength to overcome. Let the believer, then, assaulted with sinful thoughts and temptation, pray, 'Lord, increase my faith.'

* 2 Cor. x. 5.

† 1 John v. 4.

‡ Acts xvii. 28.

§ Gen. lxxxix. 9.

|| Heb. xi. 27.

In a single chapter it is impossible to say much on such an important subject as the Christian life. I here take the liberty of mentioning in a note a few books* which I have found most beneficial to my own soul, so that any reader who wishes to follow up the subject may obtain them. As in this chapter I have dealt with the Christian's duty to God, I feel that I cannot do better than close this chapter with an extract from an eminently good man,† showing the Christian's duty towards his fellow-creatures :

‘ I wish to live in the way which brings most honour on religion, and does most good to others. When the worldly see that religion makes a man cheerful, diligent, alive to the wants of others, and careless of his own ; not censorious, but disposed to make excuses for the faults of others, and freely confessing and really sorry for his own ; doing every part of duty with mildness, patience, meekness, and activity, whether our superiors be present or absent ; neither covetous, selfish, vain, nor proud : they will be sensible that a religion which does such things must be true, must be powerful, must be from God. They will strive to imitate it, they will perhaps be converted, and glorify God ; at any rate, they cannot speak against religion as vain.’ Or, on the other hand, ‘ If men see, in spite of the religion I profess, that I am gloomy and discontented, slothful and indifferent to the wants, to the desires, the troubles, and the happiness of others ; glad to find and to point out faults, and impatient and irritated when my own are pointed out ; proud, captious, and slothful in business, striving to show my diligence in the presence of my superiors, unwilling to take a share in fatigue, and going about it with grumbling ; fond of money and self-gratification—they will perhaps impute it to my religion,

* ‘ Thoughts on Personal Religion,’ by Dean Goulburn ; ‘ Holiness,’ by Bishop of Liverpool ; ‘ God’s Way of Holiness,’ by Dr. Bonar ; ‘ Christ our Example,’ by Caroline Fry ; ‘ Thoughts on the Christian Life,’ by Hetty Bowman.

† Rev. E. H. Bickersteth.

and possibly may say—and justly, too—that my religion is vain. In such a case, I am a stumbling-block in the way of others, my religion is mere hypocrisy, giving occasion to others to blaspheme and to continue in their sins, and bringing condemnation on myself.’

CHAPTER XVII.

MEANS OF GRACE.

‘Take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.’—EPH. vi. 13.

THERE is nothing the young Christian should be more careful to do than ‘systematically* and diligently to make use of every means of grace.† Many lose all their practical usefulness in life by neglecting at first the right use of the divinely appointed means and ways of sustaining and cultivating the spiritual life. In the first love of the young Christian, he is often so conscious of a sincere love to Christ, that means of grace seem unnecessary. And were the heart ever to remain in that state, it might be so; but the Apostle, knowing the human heart, warned his converts about an ‘evil day,’ a time when the assaults of the Evil One would have special power, and the Christian would possibly be found off his guard.

* ‘Take heed that you are diligent in the use of every means of grace—diligent in your private communion with God—diligent in your daily watchfulness over time, temper, and tongue—diligent in your private Bible-reading—diligent in your own private prayers. It is vain to expect spiritual prosperity when we are careless about these things. Let those who will, call it over-precise and legal to be particular about these things. I only reply, that there never was an eminent saint who neglected them.’—BISHOP OF LIVERPOOL.

† I feel that I cannot do justice to the subject of Holy Communion and Confirmation, as means of grace, without considerably enlarging this book, so I have omitted all reference to either.

PRAYER.

The first thing the new-born babe does, is to cry ; and so the first thing the young believer, who has just experienced the ' new birth,' should do is to cry to God in prayer, or, as the Apostle puts it, ' Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.'* What breath is to the body, so is prayer to the soul. There can be no life without it. If the breathing of any child becomes heavy and slow, or hurried and irregular, at once the physician is sent for ; and so if prayer be not regularly maintained, we may be sure something is wrong, and the sooner the aid of the Great Physician of souls is sought, the better.

Prayer is not only a privilege, and a means of sustaining spiritual life, but is moreover a duty we owe to God. ' Prayer is designed not only to be serviceable to man, but honourable to God. It is a tax (redounding indeed with unspeakable benefits to the tax-payer, but still it is a tax) laid upon our time ; just as almsgiving is a tax laid upon our substance. And if we would render unto God the things that are God's, the tribute-money must be faithfully and punctually paid. This indeed is the inner principle and spirit of the fourth commandment (concerning the day of rest). God says we must keep a certain portion of our time clear from secular occupations. That time is to be devoted to the observance of His ordinances, and to attendance upon His worship. It is true that we reap priceless blessings from this observance and attendance. But the blessings are not the sole point to be considered. All our time, from the cradle to the grave, is due to God. Therefore, one day in each week, and, on precisely the same principle, a certain portion of our leisure each day, must be fenced round from the intrusion of secular cares and secular business, and reserved for devotion, in acknowledgment that we hold all from Him.'†

* Eph. vi. 18.

† Dean Goulburn.

'We are told that when the Apostles returned from their first ministerial work, our Lord "took them and went aside privately into a desert place." We cannot doubt that this was done with a deep meaning. It was meant to teach the great lesson that those who do public work for the souls of others must be careful to take time for being alone with God. The lesson is one which many Christians would do well to remember. Occasional retirement, self-inquiry, meditation and secret communion with God are absolutely essential to spiritual health. The man who neglects them is in great danger of a fall. To be always preaching, teaching, speaking, writing, and working public works, is unquestionably a sign of zeal. But it is not always a sign of zeal according to knowledge. It often leads to untoward consequences. We must take time occasionally for sitting down and calmly looking within, and examining how matters stand between our own selves and Christ. The omission of the practice is the true account of many a backsliding which shocks the Church, and gives occasion to the world to blaspheme. Many could say with sorrow, in the words of Canticles, "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept."*

No amount of Christian activity will compensate for loss of time given to prayer. Strength for work must be obtained in the closet at the Throne of grace. The experience of many who have lost sight of this grand truth is summed up in the following lines :

'Broken vows, unanswered prayer,
Vain endeavour, sad despair,
Weary working, useless toil,
Fruitless sowing in Earth's soil,
Plans o'erturned, and wishes crossed,
Souls unsaved, and labour lost ;
Such, O Lord, my lot must be,
If I work apart from Thee.'

* Bishop of Liverpool.

The more active labourers in the vineyard are, the more they need the summons, 'Come ye yourselves apart . . . and rest awhile.'* If the disciples needed time 'to mend their nets' after toiling, much more so will the fishers of men require time, when they cease to come into contact with men, and at the Throne of grace can seek that spiritual strength they require ere they go forth to the work again. 'A prayerless day of hard work (secular or religious), consecrated by no holy meditation, oh—what a dull, plodding, tramping day is it!†

The more the believer gets to know his own heart, the more will he feel his own weakness. This very sense of weakness and fear of falling becomes the true source of strength, for then he is led to wrestle in prayer‡ for power to overcome :

'The devil trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.'

Power to overcome does not consist in a strong resolution, or in the exercise of the will, though these, as good gifts from God to be used or abused, are to be enlisted in the conflict, and brought to bear as useful adjuncts. But they cannot be depended upon :

'How weak the barrier mere nature proves,
Opposed to sins that nature loves.'

That power, however, does consist in Divine strength given in answer to prayer. But we must not suppose that when we pray, 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,' that God will answer the prayer by never exposing us to the temptation. Experience teaches the contrary, and that the prayer is just as

‡ 'He will soon discover that prayer is literally, and not merely in a figure, "the Christian's breath of life;" and that to attempt to carry on the spiritual life without more prayer than the recital of a form on rising, and retiring to rest, is about the same absurdity as it would be for a man to open his casement morning and evening, and inhale the fresh air for a few minutes, and then say to himself on closing it, that that amount of breathing must suffice him for the rest of the day.'—DEAN GOULBURN.

* Mark vi. 31.

† Dean Goulburn.

truly answered by grace and strength being given to overcome when exposed. In nature we find that those trees which are most exposed to the wind and tempest are just the very ones that strike their roots deepest into the soil. It is recorded of the man who built a house in a country where violent storms raged, that he not only sought a good foundation, but that he 'dugged deep,'* and thus obtained a more secure hold. The more tempestuous the place, the deeper would the foundation be laid. God does not make sickly hothouse plants of His children, by never exposing them, but, when tempted, He gives them power to overcome.

But some will say, 'I have prayed and prayed, and yet, far from feeling better, I sometimes think I am getting worse and worse. If God answers prayer, why does He not answer my prayers? Surely, prayer for holiness is in accordance with His will?' Undoubtedly it is, and possibly He is answering it; only, perhaps, not in the way anticipated. Many most advanced Christians have experienced this same feeling, as old John Newton says:

"'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.
I thought that in some favoured hour
At once He'd answer my request,
And by His love's constraining power
Subdue my sins and give me rest;
Instead of this He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of Hell
Assault my soul in every part.
"Lord, why is this," I trembling cried;
"Wilt Thou pursue this worm to death?"
"'Tis in this way," the Lord replied,
"I answer prayer for grace and truth."

Perhaps, if we look into it, we may see the reason why God thus answers prayer. The human heart is essentially proud

* Luke vi. 48.

and self-righteous. Even the advanced Christian knows but imperfectly the evil nature of his heart. We pray for holiness and power to overcome sin. Were God at once to answer our prayer and give us an easy victory over sin, the effects would probably be that spiritual pride would reign within. The Divine method seems to be rather to let us learn more and more the power of sin, so that we may learn by degrees how little power we have to overcome apart from Christ. The more we feel our own insufficiency, the more we look to Him for strength. Thus our 'strength is made perfect in weakness.'

BIBLE READINGS.

As the first thing the newborn babe does is to cry, so the first food it has to feed on is milk. This is an illustration frequently used in the Bible. 'As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.'* As in physical life, so in spiritual, without food it cannot be sustained. Hence the importance of the young Christian at once making a point of regular and careful study of God's Holy Word. Without such systematic reading he cannot hope to sustain or strengthen his spiritual life. Tracts and books, good and useful as they may be, can never take the place of the Bible itself. Those alone who are 'mighty in the Scriptures' are 'instructed in the way of the Lord,' and become 'fervent in the Spirit.'† The Psalmist says, 'Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.'‡ 'Thy Word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee.'§ When it is observed that the child does not enjoy its food, the natural conclusion is that something is wrong; and so let the reader beware when he finds himself without any relish for God's Word.

At first it is the 'sincere milk of the word,' or the simplest Gospel truth, that the young believer needs. But as the diet

* 1 Peter ii. 2. † Acts xviii. 25. ‡ Psa. cxix. 105. § Psa. cxix. 11.

of the growing child has to be changed to something stronger, so by degrees, as the Christian life develops from infancy to manhood, the believer will require something more than the elementary principles of the Gospel. The Apostle says, 'For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil.*' Elsewhere he says, 'Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.†' It is also said to the honour of the Bereans that they 'were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures *daily*, whether these things were so.‡'

Though all Christians agree as to the importance of a careful and systematic study of God's Word, few agree as to the exact method to be pursued. The subject has lately received a good deal of attention, and the results have been the formation of one or two large Bible Reading Societies, each member of which promises to read the appointed chapter for the day. This is also the intention in the Church of England in the appointed Lessons, Epistles, Gospels and Psalms for the day, to get all her members to read the same chapters, so as to have their thoughts directed to the same subjects at the same time. One of the great advantages of the Christian Year system is, that certain prominent events of the Scriptures are called to one's memory at certain times, and during those seasons all the Scriptures that touch on that subject are thus brought to bear. It certainly has this great advantage, that in the course of a year no prominent parts of Scripture are by any chance omitted.

Useful as good commentaries on the Bible are, it does not do to be too dependent on them. Each person should daily read a portion without the aid of a commentary. It teaches

* Heb. v. 13.

† Eph. vi. 17.

‡ Acts xvii. 11.

them to think, and to compare one portion of the Bible with another. With this object a Bagster's Bible is invaluable, as the marginal references are excellent. Thus the Bible can frequently be its own commentary by the reader turning from one text to another to explain the meaning. While doing this a good concordance will sometimes prove of the greatest use.

Although it does not do to be too dependent on a commentary* no well-read student of the Bible will ever be without one. The first commentary a reader should get ought always to be a *devotional* one, giving the spiritual meaning of the Bible. In after years he will need a good *critical* one, but he should first go carefully through the Bible with a devotional aim.

ASSEMBLIES.

St. Paul exhorted his converts to 'Consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.'† From the time when 'they that feared the Lord spake often one to another,'‡ down to the present time, the gathering together of the Lord's people has ever been looked upon as a most important means of grace. Visible unity is not only important as a thing that the outside world can see, and take knowledge of, but it is a great help to each individual composing that assembly. It is an admitted law that 'unity is strength.' When standing alone one is very liable in the 'evil day,' the season of coldness and temptation, to call in question the foundation on which we stand, the fundamental principles which have caused us to separate from the rest of the world. To find one's self in company from time to time with other

* People differ very much as to which of the many that have been written is the best, but, all things considered, I have found the old-fashioned one by Henry and Scott, published by the Religious Tract Society, most useful and practical. It consists *in extenso* of six volumes; but an abridged edition in three small volumes has also been published, which will be found most useful.

† Heb. x. 25.

‡ Mal. iii. 16.

pilgrims in the same path, gives one a feeling of confidence and assurance. Warm and hearty Christian men and women after all are but human beings, with all the social instincts of their kind. Alone, they are in danger of getting cold and lifeless; and, forgetting the aim and object of their new life, they are prone to take up with the things of the present life, and thus lose their testimony and individuality in the world. Together they help to 'provoke one another unto love and to good works.'*

In every well-conducted parish, or church, it should be the aim of the minister, in addition to the appointed services of Sundays and week-days, to develop and encourage opportunities for gathering his people together, in order to promote spiritual life and congregational unity, such as Bible Readings, Communicant's Prayer Meetings, Drawing-room Meetings for the upper classes, cottage and schoolroom meetings for the lower classes, according to the tastes and wants of his congregation. It is in these spontaneous gatherings that the true life of a church shows itself. On Sundays it is fashionable to attend Divine service, and few respectable people miss the opportunity. But like Gideon's host, that large body will become considerably reduced when the test of a week day gathering at some slight inconvenience or cost of pleasure is applied. Of course sometimes duties interfere, but as a rule these gatherings must be very badly timed if none of them prove convenient to one whose heart can respond to that of the Psalmist when he said, 'A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand' spent elsewhere. †

The children of the world show much more zeal and earnestness in their gatherings than the children of light. They are not to be balked by a few drops of rain, nor do they seem to be so afraid of catching cold; if they are not in a position to drive, they put on their waterproofs and walk. Nothing en-

* Heb. x. 24.

† Psa. lxxiv. 10.

courages the minister more than to see his people, in spite of a few difficulties, gather round him, and thus show that they appreciate the means of grace. On the other hand, when he has had perhaps to tramp through rain, mud, and wind, possibly after a hard day's work, nothing so damps his zeal and energy as to find empty seats, and a thinly-attended congregation. It is recorded in Church history, at a time when the public reading of the Bible would have entailed death, that one of the early Christians, in the cold of winter as well as in summer, used to swim a river, with his clothes tied up in a bundle over his head to keep them dry, merely for the sake of reading the Bible with one who lived on the other side. Need we then wonder that they were giants in those days, compared with the more feeble, effeminate Christianity of the present day! They thus learnt to know their God, and 'the people that do *know* their God shall be strong, and do exploits.'

* Dan. xi. 32.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY.

‘Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.’

I FEEL that I cannot do better than devote the last chapter of this book to the subject of the highest form of work we can engage in, namely, work for God. I heard a clergyman tell a story the other day of a rich man of business in London, who had a son who had been brought to a knowledge of Christ as his Saviour. The son, considering the morality of the business very doubtful, desired to leave it, and devote himself to the work of God in the ministry. His father bitterly opposed him, and threatened to leave him nothing in his will. Undeterred, the son carried out his intention, and the father consequently declined ever to see him. When the old man was dying, however, and brought face to face with eternity, he changed his mind, and sending for all his sons, uttered these dying words, ‘John was right.’ When too late, the poor old man realized that money-grubbing was after all not the highest work to engage in. As long, however, as a man’s business or profession is a legitimate one, he is not asked to leave it. On the contrary, he is directed to ‘abide in the same calling wherein he was called,’* and to do his duty, ‘not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.’ There are, however,

* 1 Cor. vii. 20.

very few occupations in life in which a person can find no time for God's service in a greater or lesser degree. The three most recent Lord Chancellors, Lord Hatherley, Lord Cairns, and Lord Selborne, are all reported to have found time to engage in teaching in a Sunday-school.

Nothing enlarges a man's view of life so much as his own conversion. Before conversion, the great majority made self the central object round which all their plans and thoughts revolve. Doing well in life, being popular, good at their profession, and fulfilling all the relationships properly, has perhaps hitherto been their ideal of life. But as soon as they are brought to a knowledge of Christ as their Saviour, and realize that they are *sons* of God, they should awake to higher and worthier aims. As young swans at once take to the water, so young believers should ask with St. Paul, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Realizing their individual and personal responsibility, they should desire to make known to others what 'great things the Lord hath done' for them. They should not be satisfied with merely paying others to do the work of saving souls, but long to lend a helping hand, remembering our Saviour's words, 'He that gathereth not with Me, scattereth abroad.'*

It is to be feared that, in the past, too many ministers have looked with jealousy on that which should be only the natural results of their own ministry, the implanting of the missionary spirit in their godly laity, who desire to take an active part in the work of the Church. When Moses was entreated by the zealous but misguided young man Joshua to forbid two men

* 'There is a deep-seated necessity for work in the constitution of our nature. In the absence of regular and active occupation, the mind is apt to grow morbid, stagnant, and, what is more than either, selfish. One of the greatest thinkers of antiquity defined happiness to be "an energy of the soul." And is it not true? Only watch the avidity with which men in extreme old age, when one would think that the interests of this life were on the wane for them, catch at some exciting pursuit like politics. The lesson which we as Christians should draw from this observation is, that most unquestionably God has made man for activity, as well as for contemplation.'—DEAN GOULBURN.

from public speaking, his answer was, 'Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets.* And again, when the disciples with more zeal than discretion rebuked one for casting out devils because he would not follow them, our Saviour said, 'Forbid him not : for there is no man which shall do a miracle in My name that can lightly speak evil of Me, for he that is not against us is on our part.' This also doubtless was the spirit of wisdom and experience which prompted Archbishop Leighton to say, 'All Christians are God's clergy.'

Nothing requires so much tact and judgment to deal with as the missionary spirit so frequently found in the heart of the young believer. If properly guided and directed at first, it may be led into the right channel, and be most valuable to the working power of the Church. If stifled, opposed, or unwisely dealt with at first, great harm may be the result, not only to the individual, but to the Church at large. To keep a healthy body, it is absolutely necessary to give it exercise ; and to keep the spiritual life in a healthy state, work for the Saviour, in some form or other, is most valuable as a means of grace. If not wisely directed at first, the spiritual life of some becomes morbid and stagnant, or else excitable and effervescing. All are not called to work in the same way, but, if the Bible is to be any guide to us, all are called in some way or other to exercise their gifts for the benefit of others. What with Sunday schools, mothers' meetings, Bible readings, cottage meetings, schoolroom lectures and meetings, district-visiting, hospitals, workhouses, penitentiaries, etc., it speaks very badly for the life of that Church in which work cannot be found for persons of the most varied tastes and circumstances.

A story is told of a traveller in a cold snow-clad country, who was nearly perishing with cold, and frequently tempted to lie down and die. He came across a body, covered with snow,

* Num. xi. 29.

of some poor fellow who had succumbed. Removing the snow, he found some spark of life still existing. He rolled the body about, and rubbed snow into the hands and face, and gradually restored him to animation. Having done this, he found that the exertion he had taken to restore life to another had brought warmth and life to himself. Thus the best cure for spiritual depression and coldness of heart is to go to others and speak to them of the love of Christ. The old, old story then comes back again with all its freshness and sweet associations.

Christian activity has moreover a reflex influence over the life. 'The liberal soul (*margin*, soul of blessing) shall be made fat ; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.'* The ox feedeth as he treadeth out the corn, so the worker finds food for his own soul on the way. The conscientious worker is ever asking himself, Does my life correspond with my activity ? If not, he feels that there is something wrong, and he cannot speak faithfully to others if his own life is inconsistent. There is no use in preaching Christ if we do not aim to live like Him. Some there are leading inconsistent lives with painfully orthodox creeds ; others there are who are unselfish, loving characters, but who are utterly unorthodox in their views. Foolish people argue as to which is right. It seems to me that both are wrong. What is really needed is truth in doctrine, and holiness in practice. If one thing is more conspicuous in the life of Christ than another, it was His unselfish devotion to the interests of others. To talk of being His because we hold His doctrine, without making any effort to follow His example, is to exhibit very deficient views of Christianity as a whole. The Apostle says, 'If ye have not the spirit of Christ, ye are none of His.' However active a man may be, however orthodox his creed, however pure his doctrine, if his life does not correspond, he is but a stumbling-block to others. Every thoughtful person will admit that the

* Prov. xi. 25.

life tells as much as the sermon. A servant-girl was once asked if it was the sermons of her late master, a clergyman, that had been the means of her conversion. 'No,' she said. 'It was not master's sermons, it was master's life that led me to think on these things.' The active Christian cannot face the world preaching one thing, and practising another. Having then decided to be a preacher for Christ, he has a very strong motive, if not a very high one, which the inactive Christian does not possess, to regulate his life according to his teaching.

The higher and more spiritual view is to consider Him whom the Apostle told the Corinthians, that 'though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.'* Then to consider how much He suffered for us, how unworthy we were, and how little deserving of all His benefits. The more we contemplate His work for us, the more we shall love Him ; and being filled with the love of Christ, shall be constrained to cry out, 'Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel'† one way or another. If our hearts are filled with the love of Christ, and more flows daily in, the overflow must go to those around. In a stagnant pool nothing comes in, and therefore there is nothing to go out. When our activity ceases, let us ask ourselves if anything is coming in ; and if not, let us beware of spiritual stagnation.

As a means of grace, Christian activity is invaluable. Apart from the good done to others, the benefit to the individual worker is untold. Nothing sustains and nourishes the spiritual life so much as a missionary spirit. Those who do not seek to do some work of love for Christ, to render Him some gratitude for all He has done for them, are very liable to become selfish in their religion. They have the knowledge that their own souls are saved, and that they are safe, and yet they turn away selfishly indifferent to the fate of

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

† 1 Cor. ix. 16.

hundreds and thousands around them passing on into eternity, perhaps unwarned. The lepers outside Samaria, where the inhabitants were dying from famine, when they had found food, said to each other, 'We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry . . . some mischief will befall us.*' The margin reads, 'we shall find punishment.' So true it is that these slothful ones receive a punishment in the loss of true joy and peace in religion and, get very dead in their spiritual life. There are thousands dying from a famine of the Bread of Life, far more deadly than the bread which perisheth.

The excuse for silence on the part of some is, 'I find it so hard to speak to others on things I feel so deeply myself.' There is an air of plausibility about this statement. Let us analyze it more closely, and observe as a rule what class of Christians say this. I think it will be found that the more earnest ones do not indulge in this excuse. They find it very hard to speak at times; but then they attribute it not to a great depth of feeling, but to the reverse. Often when they have missed the opportunity they blame themselves for their want of love and zeal to the cause of Christ. Those who do most frequently make this excuse will, I think, generally be found to be what a witty writer has described as either 'wholly-worldly,' or 'worldly-holy.' I have often longed to see the earnestness and ability which some of these exhibit in secular topics, in which they are deeply interested, thrown into the cause of Christ. It is well to face things honestly, and to call them by their right names. If this is done, without wishing to judge harshly, I cannot help thinking, from careful observation, that the reverse of what they profess is the real reason of their silence. It is not that they feel too deeply. but because they do not feel deeply enough to care to interest others in the

* 2 Kings vii. 9.

cause, at the risk of sacrificing the good opinion of their worldly friends.

Such an excuse not only deceives others, but in reality it deceives themselves, and prevents them from making any effort to overcome what is naturally strong within all, a timidity to speak on religious topics. Let such admit that they have been like Peter, afraid to confess Christ before a maid-servant; but, like Peter, let them weep bitterly over their cowardice, and pray for strength to overcome. Then, possibly, like him, they may go forth to do a great work. Depth of feeling, far from silencing, is the true secret of speech, 'for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*' It was Peter himself who afterwards said, 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.†' How eloquent some have been in defending the name of some loved one! So true is this, that many a girl who secretly loves some absent one maintains a dogged silence, lest her eloquence should betray her secret. But we need make no secret of our love to Christ, and if we hear His name taken in vain, or what is perhaps worse to the true lover, see His claims quietly and utterly ignored, will our depth of feeling keep us silent, or will it not rather find vent in speaking of the beauties of Him 'Who is the chiefest among ten thousand,' 'the altogether lovely.‡'

I must now close this book, as it has already exceeded the limits I originally intended. With all its faults, I trust our Heavenly Father may bless it, so that some, realizing that they are dead in trespasses and sin, may not despair of rising to higher things through the divinely appointed way. The time is short, and soon these 'poor stammering tongues' of ours will lie silent in the grave. Soon, both reader and writer will be beyond this earthly scene. The book containing the records of our lives, with all their wasted moments and their

* Matt. xii. 34.

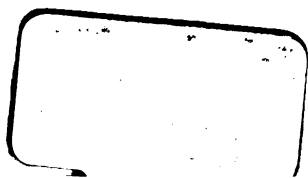
† Acts iv. 20.

‡ Cant. v. 10, 16.

misapplied talents, will then be closed. It will be too late to add or to subtract. 'What thou doest, do quickly.'

'Life is real, life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal ;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest, was not spoken of the soul.
Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us footsteps in the sands of time.'

THE END.



the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million (1990–1999) and the number of people in the public sector has increased by 2.5 million (1990–1999).

There is a growing emphasis on the need to improve the efficiency of public sector organisations. The public sector has been described as the 'big business' of the 21st century (Hart 1997). The public sector is now being treated as a business and is being subjected to the same pressures as the private sector. The public sector is being asked to do more with less. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public.

The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public.

The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public.

The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public.

The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public.

The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public. The public sector is being asked to improve its efficiency and to reduce its costs. The public sector is being asked to improve its performance and to provide better services to the public.